FRIDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2019

SINCE 1845

THE STRAITS TIMES

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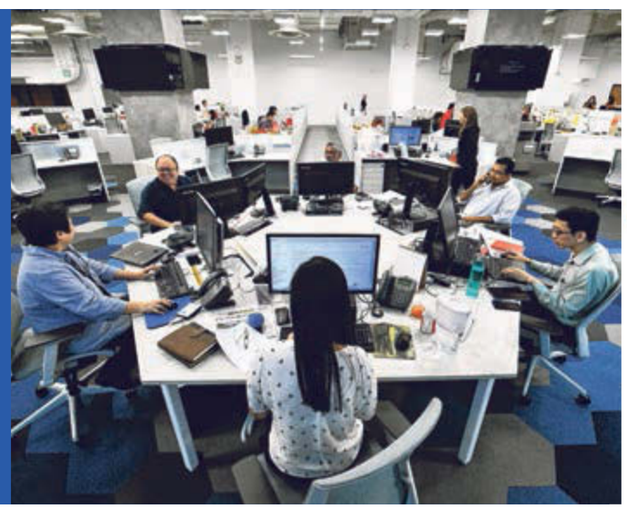

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President Halimah joins in Chinese New Year cheer

President Halimah Yacob and about 1,000 guests at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre (SCCC) took part in a mass dance led by performers on stage during the Spring Reception 2019 yesterday. The event was jointly organised by the SCCC and Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations to celebrate Chinese New Year.
ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

SingPost fined $100k for failing to meet standards

On the same day it was handed a record $100,000 fine for failing to meet delivery standards in 2017, SingPost disclosed a raft of measures to improve its service quality.

These include significantly expanding its workforce and reducing missed deliveries by extending mail delivery slots to weekday evenings and on Saturdays.

Announcing the penalty yesterday, SingPost's highest to date, the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) said that the postal service provider had not met standards on the delivery of basic letters and registered mail here over six months in 2017.

The margin of failure that year was "significant" compared with previous instances, it added.

Under the regulator's Postal Quality of Service standards, SingPost is required to deliver between 98 per cent and 99 per cent of local basic letters within one working day, and 100 per cent within two working days. It failed to meet these requirements in nine instances in 2017.

They are among several indicators that come under quarterly review by the IMDA, and falling short can result in a fine of up to $50,000 a month for each indicator.

The agency said it is assessing SingPost's Quality of Service for last year and the results will be published in the middle of this year.

The fine comes on the heels of a string of incidents involving delivery issues and lapses in SingPost's service. These recent cases "indicate gaps in SingPost's processes", the IMDA said.

SingPost said in a statement last night that it accepts the fine imposed, and is undertaking immediate measures to improve service quality as part of a broad review of its postal operations.

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A5

Home buyers can get unsold HDB flats faster under new sales option

Units offered on rolling basis for booking any time; first batch of 120 available in mid-2019

Rachel Au-Yong
Housing Correspondent

Eager home buyers can soon book a Housing Board flat the next working day after applying.

A new sales option will offer unsold flats on a rolling basis, available for booking any time.

The first batch of 120 flats under the new scheme will be open for booking around the middle of the year, Minister for National Development Lawrence Wong said in a blog post yesterday.

Currently, the fastest way for buyers to get a flat is under the Re-Offer of Balance Flats (ROF) exercise, which offers unsold flats from previous sales exercises and is usually conducted twice a year.

Applicants have to wait for a week till applications close before they find out if they are successful.

The new scheme means they can find out within a day if their application for unsold flats is successful.

"In other words, flat buyers can apply online any time on a first-come, first-served basis, and book a flat by the next working day," said Mr Wong. "This will effectively reduce their waiting time to book a flat to just one day."

A Ministry of National Development spokesman said details, such as how often the flat pool will be refreshed and how many units will be offered each time, will be announced later.

This initiative is the latest of several policies to speed up the home-buying process – in what some say are moves to encourage young couples to start families sooner.

Last year, the HDB allowed some young people, including undergraduates and national servicemen, to apply for grants to buy a flat earlier instead of chalking up one year of employment first. There are also selected Build-To-Order (BTO) estates with shorter waiting times of two to three years, compared with the usual three to four years.

Since the launch of the ROF in August 2017, 2,500 families have booked a home under the exercise. Nearly two-thirds of these households have collected the keys to their flats, said Mr Wong.

Unlike the BTO or Sales of Balance Flats exercises, applicants do not need to indicate the flat type and location under the ROF. They can book any available unit according to their eligibility, which benefits home buyers who are less particular about flat attributes or location, or have more urgent housing needs.

Mr Wong said he hoped the increased range of options will make it "easier and more convenient for potential home buyers to find a flat that meets their different needs, preferences and budget".

International Property Advisor chief executive Ku Swee Yong said the new scheme gives would-be buyers more choice: "It was previously a bit artificial to hold the leftover flats in storage. It is good that there is a rolling exercise separate from BTO launches."

OrangeTee & Tie research head Christine Sun said the scheme gives couples more flexibility in buying a flat, which can help in making other major life decisions, such as planning a wedding or having a child. "In the past, some of these families would have to turn to rental or resale flats, which can be costly," she said.

ZACD Group executive director Nicholas Mak hoped for more details about how the flats would be allocated, and wondered if less technologically savvy buyers would know how to apply and secure a flat online quickly.

rachelay@sph.com.sg

SEE HOME B2

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10 must-reads for today

1 World on warming path

The last four years were the hottest since global temperature records began, the UN has confirmed in an analysis that it said was a "clear sign of continuing long-term climate change". Boosted by a strong El Nino that normally tips the mercury northwards, 2016 remains the hottest year on record. WORLD A14

Dutch students at a rally calling for urgent measures to combat climate change during a demonstration in The Hague, the Netherlands. PHOTO: EPA/EFE

2 Faster way to buy HDB flat

A new sales option will let home buyers book a Housing Board flat the next working day after applying, and will let them find out within a day if their application is successful. The first batch of 120 unsold flats offered under the scheme will be open for booking around the middle of the year. TOP OF THE NEWS A1

3 ISIS near defeat: Trump

US President Donald Trump said he expects a formal announcement as early as next week that the coalition has reclaimed all of the territory held by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Earlier, the US reassured coalition partners that the US troop withdrawal from Syria was not "the end of America's fight". TOP OF THE NEWS A4

4 Officials in court over smog

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Bangkok Governor Aswin Kwanmuang and the National Environment Board were summoned to court yesterday over the PM2.5 air pollution crisis that has affected Greater Bangkok for nearly two months. They have been accused of negligence over the smog crisis. WORLD A10

5 Gandhi scion's challenge

Congress is relying on Ms Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to revive its fortunes in the upcoming general election. It will not be easy for her, but there is no turning back, says associate editor Ravi Velloor (below). OPINION A16

6 Farewell to businessman

A friend described the late Ben Goi as a man without airs despite being the son of a Singapore billionaire. More than 100 family members and friends paid their last respects and remembered the 43-year-old businessman, who died of a stroke on Sunday morning and was cremated yesterday. HOME B1

7 Church keeps the faith

The Parish of Christ Church (right), which celebrated its 78th anniversary last year, has seen the surrounding area change much over the years. But despite the changes, the church at the intersection of Keng Lee Road and Dorset Road still remains a spiritual home for the Tamil Christian community. HOME B4

ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

8 Insurer steps up tech drive

Insurer Prudential is teaming up with three technology companies in Singapore to develop financial and healthcare solutions, such as tailored preventive healthcare programmes. BUSINESS C1

9 Body found in Sala search

Investigators have recovered a body from the wreckage of a plane carrying Argentinian footballer Emiliano Sala in the English Channel and transported it to Britain yesterday for identification. The light aircraft was carrying the 28-year-old striker to his new Premier League team Cardiff City when it disappeared near the British island of Guernsey on Jan 21, along with 59-year-old pilot David Ibbotson. SPORT C10

10 Tailoring back in style

Fast fashion and streetwear may be all the rage at the moment, but bespoke tailoring is seeing a resurgence with consumers looking for unique styling. LIFE D3

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VIDEO

Hangout with ST

Multimedia journalists Alyssa Woo and Hairianto Diman talk about the spat between a Gojek driver and his passenger, and this year's Chinese New Year celebrations. http://str.sg/hangout50

VIDEO

Seniors deliver

Major food delivery companies in Singapore say there are about 300 riders aged 60 and above who hit the road to deliver food to hungry customers. Mr Ang Thing Yue, 62, is one of them. http://str.sg/seniorsdeliver

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Take interest in other communities to foster closer ties: President

President Halimah Yacob, with 11-year-old Yu Neng Primary School pupil Alexis Foo, exchanging Chinese New Year greetings with other guests at the spring reception at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre yesterday. With them were (from left) Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Ng Chee Meng (side to camera); Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing; Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu; Education Minister Ong Ye Kung; Manpower Minister Josephine Teo; Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, and Culture, Community and Youth Sim Ann; Mayor of Central Singapore District Denise Phua; Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Manpower Low Yen Ling; Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Koh Poh Koon; and MacPherson MP Tin Pei Ling. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Jolene Ang

An upcoming exhibition by the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre (SCCC) will showcase how Chinese culture in Singapore has evolved and been shaped by other cultures, a move that President Halimah Yacob believes could help strengthen the country's social glue.

Speaking at an event organised yesterday by the SCCC and the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations to celebrate Chinese New Year, Madam Halimah lauded the importance of taking an interest in other communities, and cited examples.

For instance, local Malay acapella group Juz-B performed Chinese songs at SCCC's Cultural Extravaganza last year, which is an event that aims to present Singapore Chinese culture in a more relatable and accessible way.

Local opera troupe Siong Leng Musical Association will also be incorporating Malay and Peranakan elements in its opening act for this year's edition of the Cultural Extravaganza in May.

"These innovative ways of showcasing our culture are important in fostering greater understanding among diverse communities, reminding us that we have much in common. It also serves as a social glue that unites our multicultural society," said Madam Halimah, adding that this is a key feature immigrants will need to embrace.

"For this reason, the SCCC is not just for the Singaporean Chinese community, but a place for all Singaporeans. Similarly, I hope the Chinese community can take a keen interest in other communities in Singapore, to foster stronger bonds between Singaporeans from different backgrounds."

The SCCC exhibition will be launched in the second half of this year at the centre's Marina Bay premises, and will run for five years.

SCCC chief executive Low Sze Wee said the exhibition "will explore the distinctiveness of Singapore Chinese culture, including ways in which Chinese culture has found synergies with other ethnic cultures to transform into today's Singapore Chinese culture".

He added: "We hope that the exhibition and our programmes will not only reach out to those who are already familiar with our Chinese culture, but also those from other ethnic communities, to build the next generation of cultural enthusiasts."

Madam Halimah also noted that as Singapore has a multiracial society, "our culture bears the imprint of influences drawn from different races in Singapore".

But Singaporeans of different races still share many common values and practices.

"We place emphasis on families as the foundation of society. This is why Chinese New Year, Hari Raya Puasa and Deepavali are times for reunions," she said.

jolenezl@sph.com.sg

US may declare ISIS defeated soon, says Trump

US leader tells coalition partners militants have lost all territory they captured in Iraq and Syria

WASHINGTON • US President Donald Trump has said he expects a formal announcement as early as next week that the coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has reclaimed all of the territory held previously by the militants.

"Their land is gone. It is a big factor – their land is gone," Mr Trump said on Wednesday to foreign ministers and other senior officials from 79 countries that have worked alongside the US in fighting the militant group in Syria and Iraq.

Mr Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from Syria led to some criticism at home from Republican and Democratic lawmakers, who fear ISIS could regain its strength.

A top US Army commander for the region, General Joseph Votel, said in Senate testimony on Tuesday that the group could experience a resurgence after a US pullout.

Mr Trump did not back down from his determination to withdraw, saying: "We look forward to giving our brave warriors in Syria a warm welcome home."

"The United States military, our coalition partners and the Syrian Democratic Forces have liberated virtually all of the territory previously held by ISIS in Syria and Iraq," Mr Trump told the gathering at the State Department.

He said the achievement "should be formally announced, sometime, probably next week, that we will have 100 per cent of the caliphate".

Earlier, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reassured coalition partners that the withdrawal of US troops from Syria was not "the end of America's fight", and asked them to help defeat ISIS permanently.

"The US troops withdrawing from Syria is not the end of America's fight. The fight is one we will continue to wage alongside you," Mr Pompeo said. "The drawdown in troops is essentially a tactical change, it is not a change in the mission. It simply represents a new stage in an old fight."

Warnings by Mr Pompeo and others that ISIS remained a dangerous threat fly in the face of Mr Trump's December declaration that the militants had been defeated and the US would withdraw its roughly 2,000 troops from Syria.

Mr Trump's sudden decision shocked coalition partners, including an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias that has been among the most effective against ISIS, and prompted the abrupt resignation of Defence Secretary Jim Mattis.

Wednesday's meeting was the first of senior coalition officials since Mr Trump announced the troop pullout. Participants included foreign ministers from Turkey, France, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Iraq.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed al-Hakim called on countries to help expose ISIS sleeper cells in Iraq and restore stability.

Mr Pompeo said that despite progress in fighting ISIS in Iraq, the group retained a strong presence in the country and was trying to mount a clandestine insurgency.

Earlier, Mr Trump said it was important to keep a US military presence in Iraq so that Washington could keep a close eye on Iran, according to a CBS interview aired on Sunday. However, Iraqi President Barham Salih said on Monday that Mr Trump did not ask Iraq's permission for US troops stationed there to "watch Iran". The US and Iran are Iraq's two biggest allies.

On Wednesday, Mr Hakim, apparently responding to Mr Trump's comment, called on countries to show full "respect for the territorial integrity of Iraq and for all operations to take place with the knowledge of Iraq, and in consultations with Iraqi security forces".

REUTERS

ON THE DEFEAT OF ISIS

It is a big factor – their land is gone.

U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

A woman and two children who had fled the fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and ISIS militants in the Syrian village of Baghuz waiting to be screened and registered by the SDF on Sunday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Desperate exodus from militants' final village

DEIR AL-ZOUR PROVINCE (Syria) • The men who emerge from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) last sliver of land are ordered to sit behind one of two orange lines spray-painted on the rocky desert floor: Syrians behind one, and Iraqis behind the other.

The women, wearing face-covering veils and clutching toddlers, huddle in a different spot, also separated by nationality.

Several of the escapees are so badly wounded from incoming fire that they have to be carried to this open vista on mattresses to surrender to the US-backed coalition.

By mid-morning, US Special Forces start arriving in a convoy of armoured vehicles. The men suspected of being ISIS fighters are ordered to approach in single file, their arms outstretched, as they are searched by troops and a sniffer dog. Then, they are fingerprinted, photographed and interviewed.

In the last two weeks, thousands of people have been streaming out of the village of Baghuz, the last speck of land under ISIS control in Iraq and Syria, an area where the group once ruled a dominion the size of Britain.

That state is all but gone. In the last month, the group has gone from holding three villages to two to just one. The militants are now trapped in an area about the size of Central Park in New York.

To the west, they are hemmed in by Syrian government forces. To the south is the Iraqi border, where Iraqi troops are holding the line. From the north and east, they are being fought by a US-backed Kurdish and Arab militia known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. As the noose has tightened, even those who joined the caliphate in its earliest days are trying to save themselves.

Most of those who have made it to this spot in the desert in recent days are the families of the militants – their multiple wives and numerous children – with only a small number of locals originally from the area mixed in, said Kurdish officials.

Out of food, the families say they have been reduced to boiling a weed that grows in highway medians.

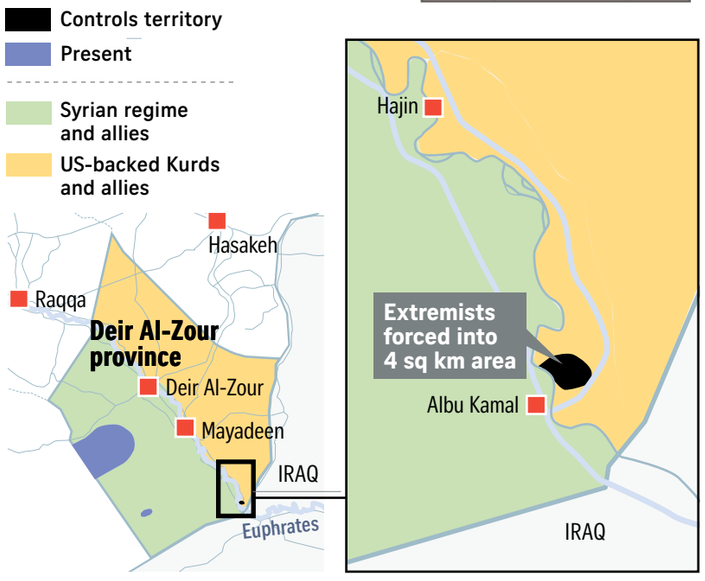
Large numbers of the escapees are foreigners, especially Iraqis who lived under ISIS before fleeing to this corner of south-eastern Syria when Iraq's cities were liberated.

But among the escapees who arrived in the last week were also Germans, French, Britons, Swedes and Russians, a testament to the group's broad appeal, which lured some 40,000 recruits from 100 countries to its nascent state.

NYTIMES

ISIS' holdout

Thousands of people have been streaming out of the village of Baghuz, the last speck of land under ISIS control in Iraq and Syria, in the past two weeks. US President Donald Trump says he may declare the group defeated as early as next week.



Source: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

SingPost taking steps to address service lapses

It announces measures to win back trust after $100k fine for failing to meet govt standards

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

A series of high-profile delivery problems and a slap on the wrist from the authorities have prompted the country's postal services provider to come up with a list of solutions to improve service quality over the coming three to six months.

While longer-term fixes are being looked at, the immediate measures will address the most pressing issues and aim to win back the public's trust, SingPost's group chief executive Paul Coutts said in a statement yesterday.

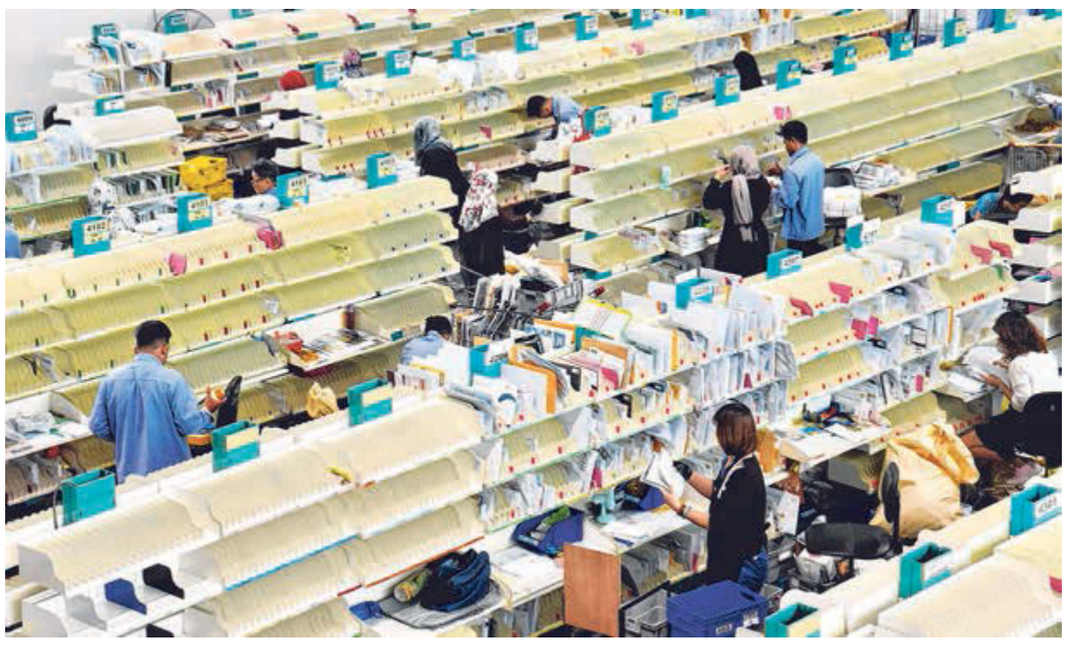
This comes after it was fined $100,000 for failing to meet government standards in 2017, as well as public criticism for a perceived drop in reliability.

The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) said yesterday that SingPost had failed to meet the requirement of 99 per cent delivery of basic local letters within the Central Business District by the next working day in May 2017.

It also failed to achieve 100 per cent delivery of basic letters by the second working day for five months that year, and did not meet this target for registered mail for three months.

The IMDA said that in the light of recent service lapses, "we require (SingPost) to implement measures urgently to meet the public's evolving postal needs", adding that it will take action for any breaches of the public postal licence requirements and standards.

SingPost, the Republic's only public postal licensee, renewed its licence in 2017 for 20 years. It was fined $10,000 in 2013 for falling short of the regulator's Postal Quality of Service standards. A year later, it incurred a $30,000 fine for having up to 500 pieces of mail stolen while left unattended.



Staff sorting mail at Singapore Post Centre in Paya Lebar. SingPost said it is "reassessing the job of its postmen" to ensure they are equipped to handle rising e-commerce volumes, among other measures. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

It has also come under fire in recent months. A postman was arrested last month when unopened letters and packages meant for Ang Mo Kio residents were found discarded in a rubbish bin.

In December, Facebook user Andy Lau claimed that a deliveryman left a note on his doorstep and ran off after knocking on his door for a few seconds. The post went viral, and prompted other social media users to share their similar experiences.

Mr Coutts apologised to customers for SingPost's service failures, and said that a fundamental review of its mail operations is under way to address them and meet the demands of the evolving postal landscape.

The e-commerce boom has resulted in large volume increases in the traditional mail infrastructure because of its cheaper postage, SingPost said. It added that the increase has "raised the postman's workload, with a significant rise in package deliveries being made to doorsteps, over and above the delivery of mail to letter boxes".

During the peak period over the last few months, each postman carried out between 50 and 60 doorstep deliveries a day on average, it added.

In view of this, SingPost is "reassessing the job of its postmen" to ensure they are equipped to handle rising e-commerce volumes.

Apart from alleviating postmen's workload, other "first steps" to address customers' grouses include hiring an additional 100 postmen and increasing the number of dedicated counters and staff at post offices for parcel collection.

Dr Seshan Ramaswami, associate professor of marketing education at Singapore Management University, said that hiring more delivery staff may prove challenging given competition from food delivery companies, and increasing the distribution of SingPost's POPStations may help to relieve some of the operational burden.

According to SingPost's third-quarter results announced earlier this month, revenue grew 7.6 per cent to $441.4 million on the back of higher peak-season volumes.

tiffanyt@sph.com.sg

• Additional reporting by Shabana Begum

Measures being adopted to improve service over next three to six months

- Work with government agencies and the Union of Telecoms Employees of Singapore to upgrade the skill set of its postal workers.
- Hire an additional 100 postmen and redeploy 35 mail-drop drivers to become full-time postmen. SingPost currently employs 1,000 postmen and processes an average of three million mail items a day.
- Enhance postmen's remuneration, with incentives for successful deliveries of trackable items to the doorstep. Launched on Feb 1, this is part of a broader salary structure review to ensure that salaries are better aligned with the requirements of the job and the industry as a whole.
- Reduce missed deliveries by extending mail delivery slots to weekday evenings and on Saturdays, with overtime pay for postmen who volunteer for these after-hours slots.
- Increase the number of dedicated counters and staff at post offices for parcel collection. Since the start of the year, volunteers from SingPost's corporate office have been helping out on weekends.
- Reduce non-core mail businesses, such as advertisement mail, to focus on core mail delivery.

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Ex-accounts clerk jailed 18 years for embezzling $46m from employers

Shaffiq Alkhatib

An accounts clerk used his employers' bank accounts as his "personal piggy bank" to misappropriate more than $46 million from them.

As Richard Tiang Teng Hoong stood in the dock yesterday, he closed his eyes and bowed his head after admitting that he had repeatedly abused his employers' trust and committed offences resulting in one of the highest monetary losses in Singapore's history of financial crime.

He appeared dazed and let out a sigh when the judge sentenced him to 18 years in jail. Tiang, who no longer works for the firms, embezzled the monies over at least 300 occasions between January 2007 and March 2014.

District Judge Mathew Joseph said the 69-year-old man had used the bank accounts of his employers as his "personal piggy bank", and added that the jail term has to deny the offender from enjoying the benefits of his crimes.

Tiang pleaded guilty yesterday to 10 criminal breach of trust charges and five counts of dealing with the benefits of his ill-gotten gains. Fifty-four other charges were considered during sentencing.

In 1990, Tiang joined Double Ace Trading Company, which managed four offshore companies: Esben Finance, Lismore Trading Company, Incredible Power and Rayley Co.

All four firms were in the timber trading business with no employees of their own. Instead, they used Double Ace to manage their operations and financial affairs.

Tiang's tasks included preparing payment vouchers and recording the movement of funds in the four companies' bank accounts.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Nicholas Lim said: "The trust reposed by the employers in the accused, a long-time employee, was so great that they would simply sign blank cheques for the accused based purely on his word that these cheques needed to be used for the business operations of the offshore companies."

But Tiang abused their trust and siphoned away their money by depositing the cheques into his own bank accounts. He also used false payment vouchers to unlawfully get hold of the funds.

DPP Lim said Tiang primarily used his ill-gotten gains for gambling activities and often placed weekly bets in excess of $100,000 with Singapore Pools. He also visited the casino at the Resorts World Sentosa about three times a week, spending about $20,000 on each visit.

On June 6, 2014, the Commercial Affairs Department received information that Tiang had misappropriated funds from the four offshore firms. However, court documents did not reveal details on how Tiang's offences were discovered.

Following this, the authorities seized Tiang's assets and he also surrendered the proceeds he obtained after selling items including his car.

The total value of the items seized and surrendered came up to almost $3 million. Yesterday, DPP Lim said this sum was only about 6.3 per cent of the total amount misappropriated.

Before handing down the sentence, Judge Joseph said the amount still unaccounted for, totalling about $43 million, was "hugely disturbing". The judge also said Tiang had displayed an "egregious abuse of trust".

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

Richard Tiang Teng Hoong, 69, was said to have used the bank accounts of his employers as his "personal piggy bank" . ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW

US envoy in Pyongyang for talks on Trump-Kim summit

He aims to negotiate unresolved issues after two leaders agreed to work towards denuclearisation

SEOUL • A senior American negotiator has arrived in North Korea to sort out crucial details for a nuclear summit meeting in Vietnam between President Donald Trump and the North's leader Kim Jong Un, with only three weeks to go before the talks take place.

Mr Stephen Biegun, the Trump administration's special representative for North Korea, arrived on Wednesday in Pyongyang, the North's capital, around the time that Mr Trump announced in his State of the Union address that he and Mr Kim would meet for a second time on Feb 27 and 28 in Vietnam.

Mr Biegun's trip had been announced in advance.

When Mr Kim and Mr Trump first met in Singapore on June 12 last year, they agreed to work towards the "complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" and to build "new" relations between their countries. Since then, however, talks have stalled over how to carry out that vaguely worded agreement.

Mr Trump now wants "significant and verifiable progress on denuclearisation, actions that are bold and real", Mr Biegun said last week in a speech at Stanford University.

But US intelligence agencies recently cautioned that the North was "unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capability".

During his Pyongyang visit, Mr Biegun plans to pursue "concrete plans to advance all of the elements of the Singapore joint statement", he said last week. He added that the working-level talks in Pyongyang would be aimed at finding concessions that each side could accept as well as "a road map of negotiations and declarations going forward, and a shared understanding of the desired outcomes of our joint efforts".

His trip to negotiate such important unresolved issues reflects the top-down diplomacy that Mr Trump and Mr Kim appear to prefer. The US envoy had his first meeting with Mr Kim Hyok Chol, his newly appointed North Korean counterpart, only three weeks ago in Washington.

Unlike their predecessors, Mr Trump and Mr Kim Jong Un have personally driven their countries' diplomatic engagement, exchanging letters and flattering remarks.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in's spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said: "We hope that both leaders will take more detailed and concrete steps in Vietnam."

Added the spokesman: "Vietnam and the United States once wielded guns and bayonets against each other, but they are now friends."

Ms Le Thi Thu Hang, spokesman for the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry, said in a statement that the country "strongly supports dialogues held with a view to maintaining peace, security and stability in the Korean peninsula".

Mr Biegun noted last week that his North Korean counterpart is from the State Affairs Commission, a powerful agency that reports directly to Mr Kim Jong Un.

US special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun arrived in Pyongyang on Wednesday.

Still, analysts have warned that Mr Kim could try to give up just enough of his nuclear weapons programme to create the illusion of progress, allowing Mr Trump to claim victory while leaving unchanged the North's long-term goal of being recognised as a de facto nuclear weapons state.

Mr Biegun has indicated that the Trump administration was softening its position to make a deal possible. He suggested that Washington might ease sanctions against the North before the North denuclearises completely, saying: "We didn't say, 'We won't do anything until you do everything.'"

Associate professor of international studies Leif-Eric Easley of Ewha Womans University in Seoul said one stated goal of Mr Biegun's trip – a "road map of negotiations and declarations going forward" – was particularly crucial.

"Without a negotiated road map, the denuclearisation process lacks transparency, accountability and a decent chance of success," said Prof Easley. NYTIMES

South Korea to spend $16b on projects in border areas by 2030

SEOUL • South Korea's government has said that it will spend 13.2 trillion won (S$16 billion) in border areas with North Korea for the next decade.

The money – comprising 5.4 trillion won from the central government, 2.2 trillion won from local governments and 5.6 trillion won from the private sector – will be spent on 225 projects in inter-Korean border areas by 2030.

The projects are aimed at establishing a foundation for inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, laying the groundwork for a balanced regional development, stimulating ecological peace tourism in the border areas as well as expanding social infrastructure, according to South Korea's Ministry of the Interior and Safety yesterday.

The development of the border areas had been limited for military security reasons.

For the past eight years through last year, a total of 2.8 trillion won had been spent on developing tourism projects, building industrial complexes and expanding transportation infrastructure.

The expanded investment for the next decade reflected changed situations at home and abroad, including improved inter-Korean relations and the need for balanced regional development, the ministry said.

About 5.1 trillion won was allocated to 21 projects to establish a foundation for inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, including the construction of a two-lane road between Yeongjong Island and Shin Island along the country's western coast.

Both countries agreed to modernise and eventually connect railways and roads along the eastern and western Korean peninsula.

The two sides held a groundbreaking ceremony in December, but the construction has yet to be launched because of international sanctions on Pyongyang.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and United States President Donald Trump have agreed to hold their second summit late this month in Vietnam. The first Kim-Trump summit was held in Singapore in June last year.

As part of the restoration of the South Korean section of the Gyeongwon Line – a train route between Seoul and the North's eastern coastal city of Wonsan – an inter-Korean cultural exchange centre will be built in Cheorwon, a border town of South Korea through which the Gyeongwon Line passes.

To develop the border areas in a balanced way, 3.4 trillion won will be spent on 54 projects, including the creation of industrial parks.

Some 3 trillion won was earmarked to stimulate ecological peace tourism in the border regions, including the creation of a walking tour route near the Demilitarised Zone that has left the Korean peninsula divided since the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice.

The remaining 1.7 trillion won was allotted to 42 projects to expand cultural, sports and welfare centres, and construct liquefied petroleum gas supply networks. XINHUA

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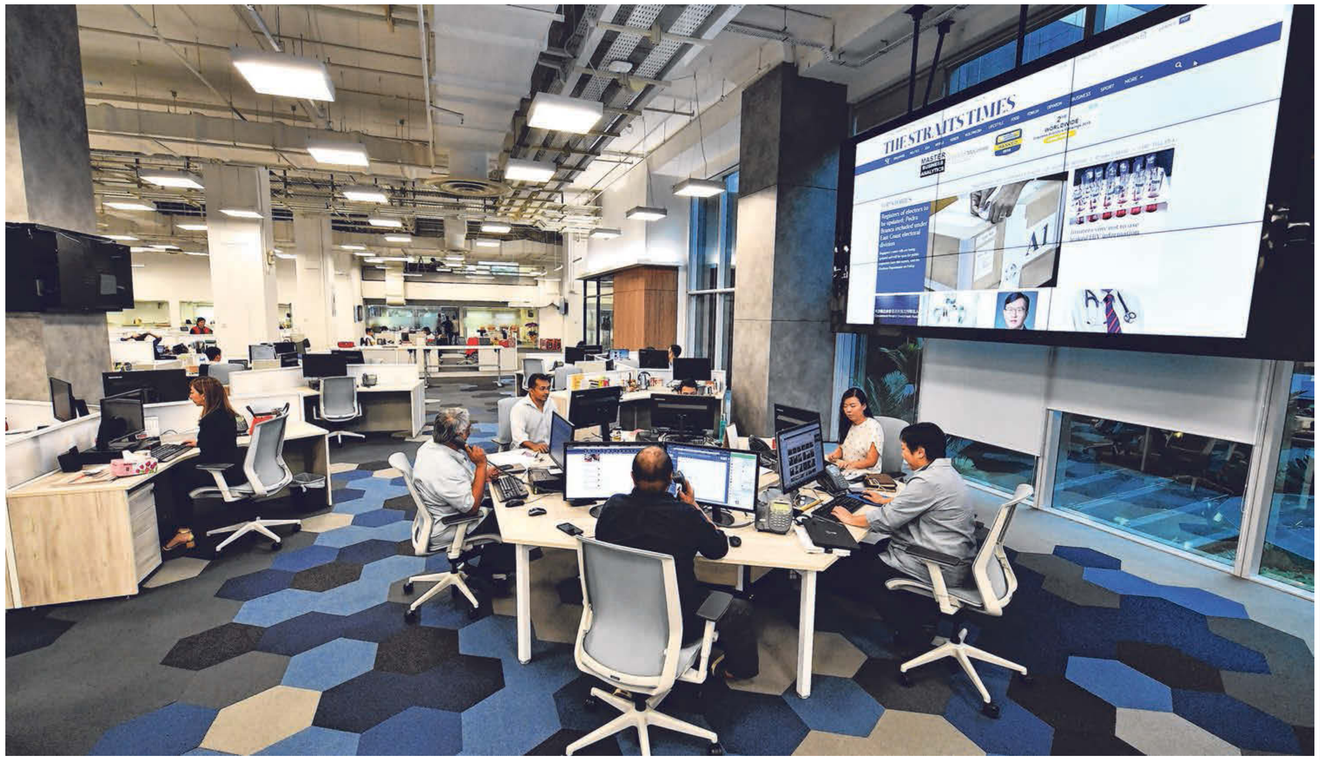

ST gets revamped newsroom with multimedia focus

New set-up designed to foster collaboration and meet readers' needs

Linette Lai

The Straits Times has returned home to its revamped newsroom, which has been transformed to enable its journalists to meet readers' changing needs.

The new set-up will allow journalists and editors from different desks to collaborate and work more seamlessly across platforms, producing content for its digital, mobile, video, radio and print products.

There is also a greater emphasis on using data to track readers' interests, with screens all around the newsroom displaying charts with real-time information on what stories are trending or gaining traction with its audience.

The Straits Times moved into its current News Centre premises in Toa Payoh North in February 2002, after 43 years at Times House in Kim Seng Road. The ST newsroom occupies the second floor of the main building, and this is its first complete renovation since it moved in.

Drawing inspiration from some of the top newsrooms in the world, the refurbished space features a central hub where the key editors of all the sections are stationed.

This facilitates cross-desk and multi-platform collaboration, said ST editor Warren Fernandez, who is also editor-in-chief of Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/Tamil Media (EMTM) Group. This is critical, he said, as The Straits Times is "no longer just a newspaper but a wholly multimedia operation", and the revamped newsroom reflects these changes.

"We thought it was time to revamp the newsroom, not just to change its look and feel, but also to reflect the changes in the way we need to operate," said Mr Fernandez. "We started from scratch and redesigned the newsroom as if we were starting to build the newsroom today."

ST executive editor Sumiko Tan said that underpinning the newsroom's transformation is a focus on data analytics. This helps journalists and editors to understand better what readers are interested in.

Journalists now receive a daily report on how their top stories performed digitally. There are also screens located all around the newsroom showing the day's most well-read stories.

Ms Tan said that before the age of data, stories were played up on the newspaper and website based mostly on editors' gut feel on what matters to readers. "Now, the data proves us right," she said.

She added that one of the goals of the revamp was to create a conducive and comfortable working space. There are numerous discussion corners, nine "phone booths" where staff can make calls or collaborate on stories, as well as brighter lighting and ergonomically designed chairs.

"We want a liveable space where people are happy to come to work and are proud to be part of the newsroom," she said.

Teams that can benefit from greater collaboration are now seated in close proximity – for instance, reporters on the education beat and those in the Schools team, which produces student publications.

EMTM deputy managing editor S. Murali, who oversaw the year-long renovation project, said that the final product was the result of a "real team effort".

For example, sub-committees were formed to look into what staff wanted for the recreation areas, pantries and also heritage corners. The Straits Times has a long history, with its first issue published on July 15, 1845.

"It is still a work in progress, but we are getting a lot of positive vibes about the new place, which is nice," he said of the new space.

Mr Peter Williams, head of EMTM Visual and ST art editor, said the design was guided by how journalists work in a changed media environment.

"We work faster than before, and getting a story out on our various platforms means having to work closer together," said Mr Williams, who oversaw the design aspects of the renovation.

"To be able to put out stories that matter – and across our platforms – means having to break down silos between departments, and to find ways to integrate print and digital in ways that surprise our readers."

The second stage of the newsroom revamp is slated for completion next month. It will feature a state-of-the-art video production and editing lab to take video production to the next level.

This includes more live, personality-based programmes on social media platforms as well as roundtable discussions with ST journalists and opinion leaders.

Mr Fernandez said: "Over the next few months, readers and viewers will see the benefits of these new facilities as we ramp up our production of content across all our products and platforms to suit their changing information needs."

linettel@sph.com.sg

ST's revamped newsroom will allow staff from different desks to collaborate and work more seamlessly across platforms, with numerous discussion corners and nine "phone booths" (below, right), where staff can make calls or work on stories together. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI, ARIFFIN JAMAR

Singapore Press Holdings chairman Lee Boon Yang (centre, in pink), Straits Times editor Warren Fernandez and other staff watching as a lion dance was performed in the new ST newsroom yesterday. The second stage of the newsroom revamp is slated for completion next month. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

The Straits Times newsroom's central hub (left), where the key editors of all the sections are stationed, and the conference room (above), where editors have their daily meetings. Screens all around the newsroom display charts with real-time information on what stories are trending or gaining traction with the audience. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI

MULTIMEDIA OPERATION

The Straits Times today is no longer just a newspaper but a wholly multimedia operation... We thought it was time to revamp the newsroom, not just to change its look and feel, but also to reflect the changes in the way we need to operate.

THE STRAITS TIMES EDITOR WARREN FERNANDEZ, who is also editor-in-chief of Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/Tamil Media Group.

WORLD

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Thai PM, Bangkok chief hauled to court over air pollution crisis

They are accused by environment body and some Bangkok residents of failing to act over dangerous smog

BANGKOK • Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Bangkok governor Aswin Kwanmuang, and the National Environment Board were summoned to testify yesterday at the Central Administrative Court over the PM2.5 air pollution crisis that has affected Greater Bangkok for nearly two months.

The court was expected to question Mr Prayut, Mr Aswin and members of the board in response to a complaint filed by the Stop Global Warming Association (SGWA) and 41 Bangkok residents.

The complainants accuse them of negligence over the smog crisis, saying they failed to invoke the Environment Act and the Public Health Act to control PM2.5 levels.

The World Health Organisation describes PM2.5 as carcinogenic. The particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less is a cause of several other health problems, with long-term exposure linked to mortality.

According to the complaint, the officials' negligence in tackling the crisis forced many schools and businesses to temporarily close last month.

A number of people have also developed respiratory disorders and the Thai economy has suffered serious damage.

Tourists, moreover, are reluctant to come to Thailand over reported air quality problems, say the complainants.

"We will prepare evidence of negligence and will strongly urge the court to order the three accused to swiftly introduce measures to deal with the sources of air pollution," said SGWA president Srisuwan Janya. He added that those burning sugarcane plantations and those buying burnt sugarcane should also face punishment.

The Thai Chamber of Commerce, meanwhile, has warned that if the smog crisis is prolonged, financial damages would amount to between 10 billion baht and 15 billion baht (S$434 million and S$651 million) a month. That estimate is based on the money people will have to spend on medical bills and N95 facial masks, as well as dwindling tourism income.

According to the Thai Chamber of Commerce, people are already spending about 594 baht a month on average for masks and related protective products.

With members of the public becoming more aware of the dangers posed by PM2.5, their spending would likely jump to 802 baht a month if the smog crisis drags on for as long as six months.

"We conducted an opinion survey on the crisis during the Chinese New Year festival which found that people are worried that the PM2.5 problem will be prolonged," said Mr Thanawat Polvichai, director of the Economic and Business Forecast Centre of the University of Thai Chamber of Commerce, on Wednesday. THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

CALL FOR SWIFT ACTION

We will prepare evidence of negligence and will strongly urge the court to order the three accused to swiftly introduce measures to deal with the sources of air pollution.

SGWA PRESIDENT SRISUWAN JANYA

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is using drones to spray a water-based solution in the air to try and ease the effects of heavy smog. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

The bad air in Bangkok has forced people young and old to resort to wearing face masks. The smog also forced the authorities to issue an unprecedented order to shut nearly 450 schools last month. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Talk of Thaksin-linked party's shock PM candidate stirs Thailand

BANGKOK • A party linked to Thailand's exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra is rapidly becoming the talk of the country amid rumours that it will announce a shock prime ministerial candidate for next month's election.

The Thai Raksa Chart Party was Thailand's top trending hashtag on Twitter yesterday over speculation about who might be named, with more than 100,000 posts.

A local media report said the candidate will not be from the Shinawatra family.

A party spokesman declined to comment on the speculation beyond saying that it will submit its choice today, the Election Commission's deadline for candidate registration.

Thai Raksa Chart is viewed as an offshoot of the main opposition Pheu Thai Party – which is linked to Thaksin – and was established about a decade ago before rebranding and re-launching late last year.

The March 24 general election will be the first since the military seized power in 2014, an intervention that unseated a Pheu Thai-led administration headed by Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister.

Thai Raksa Chart political party leader Preechapol Pongpanich (centre), and party member Chaturon Chaisang (right) on the campaign trail. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Yingluck fled Thailand in 2017 before being sentenced in absentia to five years in jail in a negligence case she said was politically motivated.

Thaksin or his allies have won every election dating back to 2001, only to be unseated by the courts or the military.

Thai Raksa Chart's Mr Chaturon Chaisang, a favourite candidate for prime minister, yesterday said he has yet to be invited to be on his party's nomination list for the post.

"I do not know since I am not a party executive," he said when asked by reporters about his party's nomination.

"Previously, I understood that I would be one of the candidates but now it's about to meet the deadline, no one has sent an invitation to me. So I think I may not have to give consent," said Mr Chaturon, who left Pheu Thai to run for the Thai Raksa Chart.

Mr Chaturon added that all decisions will depend on the party executive and they have yet to inform party members.

Each political party can submit up to three names as their candidate for the next prime minister.

Meanwhile, political risk is back in the spotlight in Thailand, a country with a history of elections followed by protests and coups. Prodemocracy parties and others that back a continuing role for the military in government are duelling for support, as one of the longest periods under a junta in Thailand's modern history comes to a close.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, the former army chief who led the 2014 coup and became head of the military administration, has yet to make his electoral intentions clear.

Palang Pracharath Party, a recently created party seen as supportive of the military government, has picked Mr Prayut as one of its prime ministerial candidates, but he has yet to accept the nomination.

The general election will be held under a military-backed Charter. Critics say the Constitution may give appointed soldiers and bureaucrats in the planned Senate the power to stifle elected politicians in the Lower House.

BLOOMBERG, THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

The US Justice Department seized Low Taek Jho's stake in Park Lane Hotel based on allegations that he had bought it with money stolen from Malaysia's state-owned 1MDB fund. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NY hotel stake sold as part of 1MDB fund recovery

US govt sells Park Lane Hotel stake seized from Jho Low to Abu Dhabi fund for $190m

NEW YORK • A stake in New York's Park Lane Hotel has been sold to an Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund as part of the US Justice Department's efforts to recover billions of dollars that flowed through Malaysia's scandal-plagued 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) investment fund.

Roughly US$140 million (S$190 million) for the interest in the hotel, which sits on Central Park South between Fifth and Sixth avenues near Manhattan's Billionaires' Row, was transferred to the US government around Dec 10, said Mr Thom Mrozek, a spokesman for the US Attorney's Office in Los Angeles.

A representative for the buyer, Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Investment, declined to comment.

The sale was made possible in November after fugitive Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho, known as Jho Low, agreed to drop his claims to the property in a US forfeiture lawsuit.

The Justice Department agreed that dropping the claims is no admission of wrongdoing or liability, according to a statement at the time. The department seized Low's stake based on allegations that he bought it with money stolen from Malaysia's state-owned 1MDB fund.

Prosecutors charged Low with conspiracy and money laundering last year in connection with the looting of 1MDB.

The department had been seeking to seize almost US$1.7 billion in assets it says were illegally acquired through money diverted from 1MDB, including the super-yacht Equanimity and artwork by Pablo Picasso and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

In recent days, potential new lenders to the Park Lane Hotel were notified of the hotel's ownership change, which has not previously been reported.

Mubadala, the Witkoff Group and partners hired a Newmark Knight Frank debt team to refinance the 631-room hotel, according to a document seen by Bloomberg News that shows that the group is seeking a US$600 million floating-rate loan.

Mubadala and Witkoff's partners in the Park Lane Hotel are hotel manager Highgate Hotels and New Valley, a unit of Vector Group.

Newmark Knight Frank and New Valley representatives declined to comment, while those for Witkoff and Highgate did not respond to messages seeking comment.

According to the document, proceeds will be used to pay down the existing loan, as well as for additional air rights and renovations.

The sale was made possible in November after fugitive Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho, known as Jho Low, agreed to drop his claims to the property in a US forfeiture lawsuit. The Justice Department agreed that dropping the claims is no admission of wrongdoing or liability, according to a statement at the time.

The value of the land is estimated to be more than US$1 billion, and the hotel itself represents "the last commercial tear-down opportunity abutting Central Park South".

The Park Lane Hotel was developed in 1967 by the late billionaire Harry Helmsley and owned by a Helmsley family trust until its purchase by Witkoff and entities affiliated with Low in 2013 for about US$654 million. Later that year, Mubadala paid Low US$135 million for a portion of his stake in the hotel.

The latest deal for a stake in the hotel follows a settlement between the Justice Department and Red Granite Pictures, which resulted in the producer of The Wolf Of Wall Street paying US$60 million to settle claims that it financed the movie with cash siphoned from 1MDB.

It also follows Sony's acquisition of EMI Music Publishing.

Low's US$415 million from that deal was deposited in a holding account on Dec 14, pending the outcome of forfeiture litigation, and could be joined by the proceeds from the sale of other assets, including a Bombardier Global 5000 jet in Singapore.

The civil forfeiture lawsuits, numbering more than a dozen, were stayed in 2017 at the Justice Department's request to protect its criminal investigation of Low and his accomplices. They remain on hold, with the exception of cases that were resolved last year. BLOOMBERG

PAS says it'll hand over bank records to MACC

PETALING JAYA • The opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) has promised to hand over bank statements of its accounts to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), which is investigating accusations that the Islamist party received RM90 million (S$30 million) from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

PAS secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan said the party would give its full cooperation to the anti-graft agency to prove that it had not received any money from 1MDB.

"We give our word that we will hand over all our documents, if requested by MACC for the purpose of investigation, including bank statements of PAS central bank accounts, to prove the allegations that PAS received RM90 million from 1MDB are merely lies and slander," he said in a statement released on Wednesday night. "We believe MACC will conduct the investigation as a body with integrity, without any fear or favour."

MACC had earlier on Wednesday confirmed that it would be investigating PAS over the matter. The investigation comes after a report was made following claims that PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang had received the funds from 1MDB accounts.

This came after Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi agreed to an out-of-court settlement for his defamation suit against Britain-based Sarawak Report editor Clare Rewcastle Brown.

Mr Abdul Hadi had sued Ms Rewcastle Brown for libel over an article she published on Aug 6, 2016, alleging that the party had received RM90 million in bribes from then ruling party Umno.

She filed a counterclaim in October 2017, but last Friday, the case was settled out of court.

According to PAS treasurer Razman Zakaria, the rising cost of legal fees is one reason why PAS opted for the out-of-court settlement.

On Sunday, former prime minister Najib Razak denied he gave RM90 million to Mr Abdul Hadi or PAS, as claimed in Ms Rewcastle Brown's article.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Malaysians contribute $67m to help pay national debt

PETALING JAYA • Tabung Harapan Malaysia, a fund started by the Malaysian government to collect money from the public to help pay the national debt, has officially closed after eight months.

It collected RM202,716,775.10 (S$67.3 million) by the time the fund closed on Jan 14.

Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng said all donations made after that date will be returned to contributors.

"The amount from this contribution will be used for the federal government's debt repayment," Mr Lim said in a statement yesterday. "The Finance Ministry is in the process of adjusting the closure of the account before auditing is carried out by the Auditor-General's Department."

Soon after taking power in the May general election last year, the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government started the fund so that the public could help pay the national debt totalling RM1 trillion. This was higher than the figure announced by the previous administration.

Donations to Tabung Harapan or the Hope Fund, came from members of the public and corporations.

Last June, then Malaysian King Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan offered to reduce his allowance and emoluments by 10 per cent until the end of his reign to help reduce the national debt burden.

This followed a move by federal ministers led by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to take a 10 per cent pay cut, in a symbolic gesture of austerity.

"The federal government extends its highest appreciation to all Malaysians who have contributed," Mr Lim said.

"Their contribution reflects their loyalty to and love of our beloved country. In addition, it gives encouragement to the government to work hard to resolve the debt-inherited problems of the federal government."

A committee chaired by Treasury secretary-general Ahmad Badri Mohd Zahir will determine how the contributions will be channelled, in accordance with the procedures set out in Tabung Harapan's trust deed account. This would ensure that the fund's management is organised with integrity, said Mr Lim.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Japan PM Abe strikes dovish tone on Russia at islands rally

TOKYO • Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe struck a conciliatory tone with Russia at an annual rally yesterday to demand the return of small northern isles claimed by both nations.

The conservative leader did not explicitly demand sovereignty of the Southern Kuril Islands, an emotive issue that has prevented the Asian economic power from signing an official peace treaty with Moscow since World War II.

Instead, he vowed to focus on concluding an official peace treaty with Russia, after meeting President Vladimir Putin 25 times, most recently last month.

"It is not easy to resolve an issue that has remained unresolved for 73 years," Mr Abe told the rally in Tokyo, which was attended by hundreds of former islanders and their relatives.

"I am determined to take on the work to resolve the territorial issue by taking one step at a time with your earnest desire etched in my heart," he said.

Mr Abe speaks at the rally every year, but struck a relatively softer tone at this year's event.

Despite the row, Tokyo and Moscow already have vibrant economic relations, with the likes of Toyota and Japanese energy firms heavily invested in Russia, operating major factories and sales networks.

And in recent years, Mr Abe and Mr Putin have discussed joint economic projects on the disputed islands between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean. The Soviet army seized them in the last days of World War II, and Russia continues to control them.

Tokyo's traditional refusal to recognise Moscow's sovereignty there has been a barrier to a formal peace deal.

However, the two sides did sign a 1956 Soviet-Japanese declaration that Japan would receive two of the smaller islands after a peace deal.

Mr Abe said the foreign ministers and special envoys from the two nations will meet this month to discuss a peace treaty, before he plans to meet Mr Putin again in June on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit that Japan will host.

The Prime Minister also said he would work with Moscow to enable former residents to visit their birth or ancestral places.

At the rally, Mr Abe spoke in front of a large banner saying "Return the Four Northern Islands". But he did not utter the phrase.

His focus on economic ties and delicate language on the sovereignty issue prompted some islanders to urge him to focus more on the subject, while others saw it as a realistic approach.

"We must not give up. We must demand the return of all four islands," said Mr Kimio Waki, 78, who left his home island of Kunashiri at the age of seven after World War II.

"Joint economic projects are in focus. But there is no path forward as far as the return of the islands goes," he said. "I want to see results." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A STEP AT A TIME

It is not easy to resolve an issue that has remained unresolved for 73 years... I am determined to take on the work to resolve the territorial issue by taking one step at a time with your earnest desire etched in my heart.

JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER SHINZO ABE, on the row with Russia over the Southern Kuril Islands claimed by both nations.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not take a combative stance at yesterday's rally. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

KL minister in hot water over his 'fake degree'

He clarifies that qualification is from Cambridge in US and not UK, but many question institution's credibility

Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister Marzuki Yahya's educational background has come under scrutiny after doubts were raised on social media over whether he had a degree in business administration from Britain's prestigious Cambridge University. PHOTO: BERNAMA

KUALA LUMPUR • Malaysia's Deputy Foreign Minister was urged to resign yesterday following allegations that he lied about having a degree from Cambridge University, with an opposition lawmaker accusing him of "deceiving the people".

Datuk Marzuki Yahya's educational background came under scrutiny after doubts were raised on social media that he had a distance-learning degree in business administration from the prestigious British institution, which was previously listed on his Wikipedia profile.

After initially insisting he would prove he had the degree, Mr Marzuki said late on Wednesday that he had in fact not studied at the British university, but at Cambridge International University in the United States. "I think they misunderstood (my credentials). I (studied) at the Cambridge International University in the US," Mr Marzuki – a member of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), a party in the ruling alliance – told news site Malaysiakini.

"I was doing logistics (before joining politics). So I just took that certificate for my knowledge to expand my business."

One of the programmes listed on the US institution's website is logistics.

The claim sparked mocking comments in Malaysia, with many questioning the institution's credibility.

"Why did Marzuki make a U-turn from the United Kingdom to the US? Perhaps this is not a mere U-turn, but more likely a somersault," said Datuk Seri Wee Ka Siong, president of the opposition Malaysian Chinese Association.

Cambridge International University says on its website that it is not accredited with the US education authorities and that it offers 150 programmes – including casino management – yet lists only 25 faculty members.

Checks by The Star on the faculty member list on the website found one "associate professor" Patricia Powell whose profile picture bears the watermark of an international online dating site that predominantly features Eastern European women.

Attempts to e-mail faculty and adjunct faculty members of the institution for clarification failed, with the mail delivery subsystem noting that these e-mail addresses could not be found or that the server was unable to receive mail.

Main opposition party Umno has called on Mr Marzuki to quit.

"How do you (Marzuki) deceive the people with a fake degree and then claim you are fighting against corruption and propagating good governance and ethics?" Umno Youth chief Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki told The Star newspaper.

Some of Mr Marzuki's comrades have come to his defence.

PPBM supreme council member Tariq Ismail said Mr Marzuki should not be judged solely on his allegedly fake degree. "A degree is just a piece of paper that gets you into the workplace. The rest is up to you. Having a dubious degree or not having graduated can be a stigma, but as long as people don't rape or steal, it is fine," said Mr Tariq.

"People should look for dedication and teamwork. He's not going to be CEO of Goldman Sachs, BP or Felda, or resuscitate Enron. All those people who headed those companies had degrees but were crooks who stole," he added.

PPBM deputy president Mukhriz Mahathir said Mr Marzuki was not appointed because of his paper qualifications.

"I'm sure he was not picked to be a deputy minister on the supposed merit of his brandishing a Cambridge University degree," Datuk Seri Mukhriz told The Star.

The controversy will be a blow to the administration of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, which has pledged to fight corruption and improve the government's integrity.

The previous Barisan Nasional government of Najib Razak became embroiled in a multibillion-dollar scandal surrounding state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad, which played a large part in its shock election defeat last May.

Said PPBM strategist and supreme council member Rais Hussin: "One should have high integrity (when holding office), as one thing (for which) we fought against Barisan was the lack of integrity. Integrity is everything and everything."

He added: "If indeed Marzuki had misrepresented himself academically, then he should apologise and move on." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Children with measles in an overcrowded room at a government hospital in the Philippine capital Manila yesterday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Philippines hit by deadly measles outbreak

Raul Dancel
Philippines Correspondent
In Manila

The Philippines is battling a surge in measles cases in the capital Manila as well as elsewhere in the country, with dozens dying from a disease which was long under control.

As many as 57 people, including infants and children, have died at the government-run San Lazaro Hospital in Manila, its spokesman Ferdinand de Guzman said.

The Health Department believes the spike in cases is due to parents opting not to have their children vaccinated for measles and other highly contagious diseases.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque told reporters yesterday that measles cases in Manila and in seven other regions had increased more than five times to 1,500 so far this year from just 250 a year ago. There has been "a big, big difference", he said.

A total of 441 cases were reported in metropolitan Manila – which spans 16 cities and one town – a 1,125 per cent rise from last year. In the eastern part of the central Philippines, the uptick has been as high as 5,000 per cent, from just a single case a year ago to 54 as of Jan 26.

The Health Department and public health advocates have blamed the measles outbreak on a massive health scare over Dengvaxia, the once-promising dengue vaccine introduced by the government three years ago.

In early 2016, the department, under then President Benigno Aquino, rolled out a 3.5 billion peso (S$91 million) programme to inoculate a million school-age children with Dengvaxia to protect them against dengue, a mosquito-borne disease that afflicts hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Public health advocates opposing the programme warned at the time that the vaccine could lead to deadlier strains of the disease.

In late 2017, French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi, which licensed Dengvaxia, disclosed that the vaccine, in rare cases, could indeed backfire: If children who never had dengue are vaccinated and later become infected, the vaccine may provoke a much more severe form of the illness.

That triggered investigations in Congress. The anti-dengue programme was scrapped, and Sanofi was forced to refund 1.16 billion pesos' worth of unused vaccines.

The Justice Department filed criminal charges against more than 30 health officials for the deaths of about 100 children, which a probe by the Public Attorney's Office had linked to Dengvaxia.

On Tuesday, a congressional panel said Mr Aquino himself was liable for graft for backing Sanofi and pressing on with the dengue immunisation programme despite concerns over Dengvaxia.

A study last year by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said public confidence in vaccines in the Philippines plunged to 32 per cent from 93 per cent in 2015 because of the government's "highly politicised" response to the Dengvaxia scare.

The Health Department reported that vaccine coverage rate plunged to 40 per cent last year from 70 per cent in 2017. In the first three quarters of last year, the number of non-vaccinated children rose to more than 960,000 from some 850,000 a year earlier.

rdancel@sph.com.sg

Thailand flags risks of massage for those who are pregnant

BANGKOK • Massage can be dangerous for women at different stages of their pregnancy, Thailand's Public Health Ministry has warned after a woman suffered a miscarriage and went into a coma after getting a foot massage in Chiang Mai province.

"Women who are less than three months into their pregnancy should avoid massage because it may lead to miscarriage," Dr Khwanchai Visithanon said on Wednesday in his capacity as deputy spokesman for the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine.

Dr Khwanchai warned women who are more than six months into their pregnancy to also be cautious about getting a massage. "Pregnant women should also only go for a massage at a place where the masseurs are qualified practitioners of traditional Thai medicine and have undergone at least 800 hours of training," he said.

He added that massage parlours approved by the Health Service Support Department were required to use masseurs with at least 150 hours of training.

On Tuesday, the family of 25-year-old Wirawan Ketkesi issued a public call for help.

The family said Ms Wirawan suffered a seizure while getting a foot massage on Jan 11. The masseur tried to resuscitate her before she was rushed to hospital.

At the hospital, doctors discovered that she had suffered a miscarriage and surgically removed the dead foetus. But the patient has been in a coma ever since.

Chiang Mai's deputy public health chief Waranyu Jamnongprasartporn said masseurs are required to check if their customers are pregnant or have any chronic disease before starting the massage, adding that all massage parlours must be licensed.

But he admitted that it was not possible to check every parlour in the province, adding "we have conducted random checks to boost customers' safety".

THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

China: Tests show no HIV in 'tainted' medical item

BEIJING • China is investigating a manufacturer of medical products following reports that it sold human immunoglobulin for intravenous injection that had possibly been contaminated with HIV, though the authorities said tests found no sign of the virus.

Beijing has repeatedly vowed tighter oversight and crackdowns on firms and officials after food and drug safety scandals sparked public outrage, such as one last month over expired polio vaccines and another last year over a rabies vaccine.

Human immunoglobulin, made with human blood plasma, is used to treat a variety of conditions, but it was not clear how many people might have had injections from the suspect batch, which media said consisted of 12,226 units with a 2021 expiry date.

Tests on the suspect batch proved negative for HIV, officials said on Wednesday, following a comment by China's National Health Commission that there was a "very low" risk of HIV infection from it.

The Shanghai Medical Products Administration said in a statement that the batch, identified as number 20180610Z, was made by China Meheco Xinxing Pharma, a unit of state-controlled China Meheco Group.

Reuters could not get a comment from the manufacturer as most offices in China were closed for the week-long Chinese New Year holiday.

Domestic media outlet The China Economic Observer said the investigation began after an HIV test on a baby in south-eastern Jiangxi province initially yielded a "weak" positive result that was traced to the batch under investigation. The baby subsequently tested negative for HIV, it added.

"Shanghai authorities have run virus tests for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C on the reported batch and they all show negative," the National Medical Products Administration said. It asked medical institutions to stop the use of the batch and seal remaining supplies for further investigations.

Shanghai's Medical Products Administration said it had ordered the manufacturer to stop production.

Last month, China's National Medical Products Administration asked manufacturers to add warnings against potential risks from intravenously-injected human immunoglobulin and frozen human immunoglobulin products, saying the raw materials were derived from human blood.

In 2016, the Shanghai medical products regulator warned the same company over changes to the manufacturing process for some human fibrinogen products without assessing potential risks, the regulator's website showed. REUTERS

Johor kidnap victim is Malaysian, says state police chief

Initial media reports said vegetable trader is Singaporean; 16 suspects arrested so far

Zaihan Mohamed Yusof

A vegetable trader who was kidnapped in southern Johor state on Jan 27 and released after five days of captivity is a Malaysian citizen, said Johor police chief Mohd Khalil Kader Mohd.

He told reporters at a press conference at the Royal Malaysian Police Johor headquarters yesterday that the 57-year-old man was "roughed up" by the kidnappers but not injured.

Datuk Khalil said in Malay: "Even though there were news reports stating the victim is a Singaporean, I want to confirm that he is not a Singapore citizen but a Malaysian."

He also revealed that 16 suspects have been arrested, and part of the ransom paid recovered.

Initial Malaysian media reports had identified the kidnap victim as a Singapore citizen, though he was not named.

The incident occurred at about 7am near Gelang Patah, just 20 minutes north of the Tuas Second Link.

The businessman, who exports vegetables to Singapore, was ambushed by two masked male suspects as he was jogging with a friend.

One suspect is believed to have fired a handgun to scare the victim, who was immediately dragged into a waiting car that had a fake licence plate. A 9mm casing was found at the incident site.

After the police were alerted by the kidnap victim's friend, they covertly began identifying the suspects. The kidnappers had demanded a ransom of RM300,000 (S$100,000) and $500,000 from the victim's family. The victim was released after his family paid RM300,000 and $265,000.

Mr Khalil said: "We waited until the victim was freed before we made the arrests."

The victim was immediately examined at Sultanah Aminah Hospital in Johor Baru after being released from a house in an undisclosed area where he was held.

The police, with help from the special investigation units from Johor and Bukit Aman, sprang into action on Jan 31 in multiple areas in Johor Baru and Kuala Lumpur.

Of the 16 arrested, 13 are males and three are females. They are aged between 21 and 59.

The suspects – all Malaysian citizens – will be held in police custody till next Monday.

Johor police have recovered part of the ransom money paid to the kidnappers. This amounted to RM92,567 and $5,190.

Initial investigations revealed that the group was in debt and it had targeted the victim, believing that he was a rich man.

Mr Khalil said: "Rest assured that we will fulfil our investigation and (ensure) all involved (in the kidnapping) are caught because this group has been active since 2010... We will trace them and maybe we can uncover some other cases where the group was involved."

The Johor police are still looking for a few other suspects.

Mr Khalil said some of the suspects are from two Chinese secret societies which have been on the police radar since 2010.

Two vehicles used in the alleged kidnap have been seized.

Investigations are ongoing.

zaihan@sph.com.sg

Johor police chief Mohd Khalil Kader Mohd with some of the ransom money recovered from the alleged kidnappers yesterday at the Royal Malaysian Police Johor headquarters. He said at the press conference that the 57-year-old victim was "roughed up" by the kidnappers but not injured. ST PHOTO: ZAIHAN MOHAMED YUSOF

Aussie ban on Chinese tycoon seen as test case of sorts

SYDNEY • Australia's decision to ban a well-connected Chinese businessman for his political activity is being seen as a potential watershed moment, the start of pushback against Beijing's long-running operations to buy influence overseas.

In less than a decade, Mr Huang Xiangmo has gone from being a new arrival in Australia to hosting swanky waterside parties with political elites, to finally being kicked out of the country and declared persona non grata – as a result of his alleged links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The 49-year-old Guangdong native is believed to be in Hong Kong, after the same officials he long courted and bankrolled revoked his residency, denied him citizenship and prevented him from returning to his multimillion-dollar Sydney mansion.

Experts say his case – which has prompted a furore in Australia over foreign donations to political parties – is a signal that Canberra is ready to curb China's ambitious operations to influence foreign political elites.

"It's a very significant thing," said Mr Michael Shoebridge, former deputy director of Australia's defence and signals intelligence agencies, pointing to Mr Huang's links to the CCP.

While the 2016 US presidential election shone a fierce spotlight on Russian intelligence agencies' "active measures" to influence and subvert events abroad, less focus has fallen on China's operations in the same area.

According to Mr Shoebridge, these are often led by the United Front Work Department, an agency of the CCP, and offshoot groups set up around the globe, like the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China.

While the United Front Work Department operates in China with close ties to party leaders, the reunification councils have been established in countries from New Zealand to the United States.

Their work also focuses on shaping public opinion and policy on contentious issues like China's claims on Taiwan, the South China Sea, Tibet and on internal issues like the treatment of ethnic Uighurs.

It was Mr Huang's political influence and his links to the United Front Work Department that reportedly set off alarm bells for the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the country's main spy agency.

"Huang was very active in promoting United Front Work and in getting close to politicians," said Mr Gerry Groot, a China expert at the University of Adelaide.

Canberra's decision to ban Mr Huang from the country "sets a precedent", said Mr Groot, adding that it is something of a test case. "It will allow the Australian government to find out how Beijing will respond."

Australia last year passed sweeping national security reforms via the Espionage and Foreign Interference Act, which broadens the range of activities that would be treated as spying. So far, that legislation has not been used for prosecutions.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Mr Huang Xiangmo, a well-connected Chinese businessman, has had his Australian residency revoked over his political activity and alleged links to China's Communist Party.

Huawei vs US govt at world's biggest wireless event this month

BERLIN • Huawei Technologies, facing a widening global crackdown on its telecommunications equipment, is bolstering its presence at the industry's biggest conference in an attempt to land deals.

Its plans risk being foiled by a powerful foe: the US government.

US officials are also increasing the size of their delegation to the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona this month, saying they want to help other nations focus on the security of next-generation mobile gear. They are not calling the meeting a showdown with Huawei, but that agenda – provided by three officials who asked not to be identified – is a not-so-veiled reference to their concerns about the Chinese tech giant over espionage allegations and sanctions busting.

The American team plans to advocate for other providers of next-generation mobile gear, such as Cisco Systems, Ericsson and Nokia, according to one of the officials.

The effort comes amid an intensified campaign by the Trump administration in Europe, the Shenzhen-based Huawei's biggest market outside China, where governments in the UK, Germany, France and other places are weighing whether to restrict its gear from 5G networks.

The American focus on Huawei has extended from its equipment to charges that it stole intellectual property and violated sanctions on exports to Iran, in an escalation of tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

Huawei has denied wrongdoing and long maintained it does not provide back doors for the Chinese government, pointing out that no one has provided evidence to support such concerns.

The US wants to convey its conviction that security of 5G networks is paramount because the technology is crucial as the world digitises, independent of an individual supplier, an official said.

MWC is a key annual event that has helped Huawei – a major sponsor of the gathering – burnish its reputation as the dominant telecoms equipment supplier.

Huawei signed several deals last year, including one with France's Bouygues Telecom to make Bordeaux the first city for a 5G network trial, and one with BT Group to do more joint 5G testing.

"We are continuing to grow at MWC," Mr Adam Mynott, a spokesman for Huawei, said by phone. "This remains our most important trade function of the year."

This year, Huawei will unveil a foldable 5G phone, demonstrate how the technology works in a joint presentation with Vodafone Group, and make executives available to network with journalists, politicians and clients.

About 100,000 people are expected to attend the four-day conference that starts on Feb 25, to see the latest phones, artificial intelligence gadgets and autonomous drones exhibited by some 2,000 companies. BLOOMBERG

Huawei is a big sponsor of the Mobile World Congress. This year, the US is using the event to help nations focus on telecoms network security. PHOTO: REUTERS

100k

Number of people expected to attend the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona this month.

2k

Number of companies represented at the show.

4

Number of days the conference, which starts on Feb 25, will last.

Name a roach after your ex for Valentine's Day

Looking for a not-so lovey-dovey Valentine's Day gift?

Here is an idea that will arrive in time for next week.

Several zoos in the United States and England are offering patrons the opportunity to name cockroaches after their former girlfriends and boyfriends.

One of them, the El Paso Zoo in Texas, will not only name a cockroach after your former love interest. It will also feed the said cockroach to a meerkat.

The best part? The zoo will be streaming the "Quit Bugging Me" meerkat event live on Facebook and its website on Valentine's Day.

These names will also be displayed around the meerkat exhibit and on social media starting Feb 11.

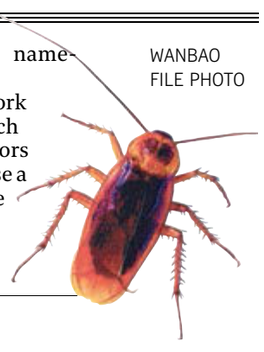
El Paso Zoo event coordinator Sarah Borrego told CBS News that this event "is a fun way to get the community involved in our daily enrichment activities" and added that meerkats love to eat cockroaches as a snack.

Besides the El Paso Zoo, Hemsley Conservation Centre in Kent, England, is inviting the public to name a cockroach in their exhibit for £1.50 (S$2.60).

Those taking part will also receive a gift certificate for their donation, which can be given to the unsuspecting cockroach namesake.

The Bronx Zoo in New York has also jumped on the roach bandwagon, giving its visitors the opportunity to purchase a "timeless gift" – the chance to name a Madagascar hissing cockroach for US$15 (S$20.30).

Choo Yun Ting



WANBAO FILE PHOTO

Teen builds his own prosthetic Lego arm

SANT CUGAT (Spain) • Nineteen-year-old David Aguilar has built himself a robotic prosthetic arm using Lego pieces after being born without a right forearm due to a rare genetic condition.

Mr Aguilar, who studies bioengineering at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya in Spain, is already using his fourth model of the colourful prosthetic and his dream is to design affordable robotic limbs for those who need them.

Once his favourite toys, the plastic bricks became the building material for Mr Aguilar's first, still very rudimentary, artificial arm at the age of nine, and each new version had more movement capability than the one before.

"As a child I was very nervous to be in front of other guys, because I was different, but that didn't stop me believing in my dreams," said the teenager from Andorra, a principality between Spain and France.

"I wanted to... see myself in the mirror like I see other guys, with two hands," said Mr Aguilar, who uses the artificial arm only occasionally and is self-sufficient without it.

All the versions are on display in his room at the university residence on the outskirts of Barcelona. The latest models are marked MK followed by the number – a tribute to comic book superhero Iron Man and his MK armour suits.

Mr Aguilar, who uses Lego pieces provided by a friend, proudly displayed a red-and-yellow, fully functional robotic arm built when he was 18, bending it in the elbow joint and flexing the grabber as the electric motor inside whirred.

A presentation video on his YouTube channel that he runs under the nickname "Hand Solo" says his aim is to show people that nothing is impossible and disability cannot stop them. After graduating from university, he wants to create affordable prosthetic solutions for people who need them. REUTERS

Mr David Aguilar with the prosthetic arm he built using Lego bricks. The 19-year-old university student, who was born without a right forearm due to a rare genetic condition, is already using his fourth model of the colourful prosthetic and his dream is to design affordable robotic limbs for those who need them. PHOTO: REUTERS

Last four years hottest on record, UN confirms

World body stresses urgent need for action to rein in runaway planetary warming

PARIS • The last four years were the hottest since global temperature records began, the UN has confirmed in an analysis that it said was a "clear sign of continuing long-term climate change".

The United Nations' World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said in November that 2018 was set to be the fourth warmest year in recorded history, stressing the urgent need for action to rein in runaway planetary warming.

On Wednesday, it incorporated the final weeks of last year into its climate models and concluded that the average global surface temperature in 2018 was 1 deg C above pre-industrial baseline levels.

Boosted by a strong El Nino that normally tips the mercury northwards, 2016 remains the hottest year on record.

The 20 warmest years in history all occurred within the last 22 years.

"The long-term temperature trend is far more important than the ranking of individual years, and that trend is an upward one," WMO secretary-general Petteri Taalas said.

"The degree of warming during the past four years has been exceptional, both on land and in the ocean."

The WMO said heightened temperatures also contributed to a number of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts and flash flooding.

"Many of the extreme weather events are consistent with what we expect from a changing climate. This is the reality we need to face up to," Mr Taalas said.

The UN body also said that 2019 has picked up where 2018 left off, with Australia experiencing its warmest January on record. It warned that intense heatwaves "are becoming more frequent as a result of climate change".

Similar reports on climate trends released by the US space agency Nasa and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also confirmed that last year was the fourth warmest in modern times.

Sea ice cover in the Arctic and Antarctic both marked the second lowest ever observed.

Meanwhile, there were 14 weather-related disasters each costing US$1 billion (S$1.35 billion) or more.

"The 14 events, in total, claimed at least 247 lives and cost US$91 billion," NOAA said in a statement.

"About US$73 billion of this total was attributable to three events: Hurricanes Michael (US$25 billion) and Florence (US$24 billion), and the complex of western wildfires (US$24 billion)."

As parts of the mid-western United States were gripped by a "polar vortex" last week that saw temperatures plunge to lows of -53 deg C, President Donald Trump suggested that the cold weather front cast doubt over the veracity of climate change data.

"What the hell is going on with Global Waming? (sic) Please come back fast, we need you!" he said on Twitter.

Mr Taalas said that the deadly cold snap was entirely consistent with the effects of man-made climate change, including the warming of the poles.

"A part of the cold anomalies at lower latitudes could be linked to dramatic changes in the Arctic," he said.

"What happens at the poles does not stay at the poles, but influences weather and climate conditions in lower latitudes where hundreds of millions of people live."

As much of the world continues to rely on fossil fuels, greenhouse gases will keep mounting, trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Professor Rowan Sutton, director of science for the National Centre for Atmospheric Science in Britain, said that will likely mean more heat records in the years to come.

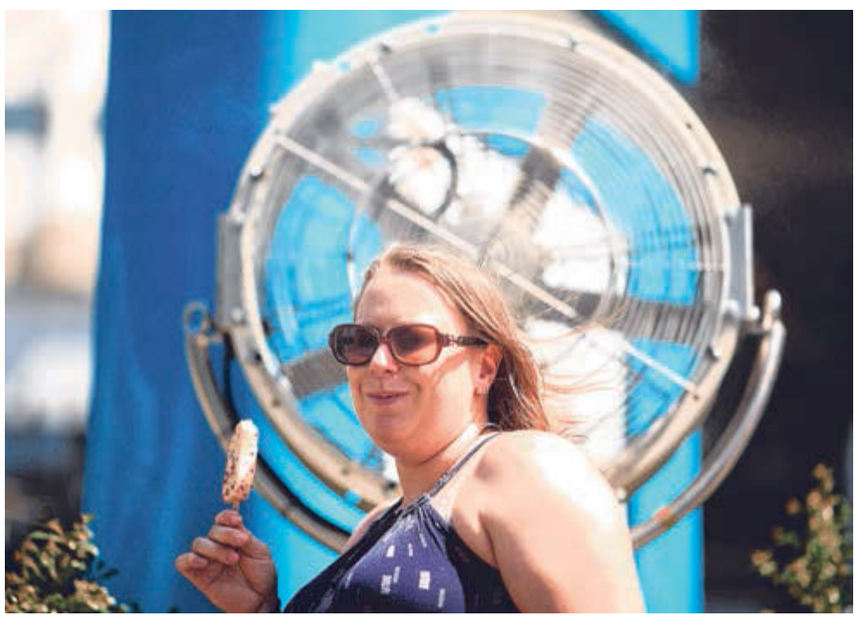
"Over the next five years, the high temperatures seen recently are likely to be sustained and that further warming may well occur, perhaps reaching new record levels for annual average temperatures," he said.

Professor Brian Hoskins, chair of the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, agreed.

"Our lack of decisive action over climate change makes us like a climber ascending a mountain, knowing that there will not be enough oxygen at some height, yet still we go on," he said.

"Not every individual step takes us nearer disaster, but as confirmed by the Met Office, our general direction is clear."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



The UN's World Meteorological Organisation says 2019 has picked up where 2018 left off, with Australia experiencing its warmest January on record. It also warns that intense heatwaves "are becoming more frequent as a result of climate change". PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

2018: Significant climate events

1 **Alaska**
Second warmest year on record after 2016

2 **Hawaii**
Heavy rain in April: 1,262mm recorded in 24 hours, a US record

3 **United States**
Third wettest year on record

4 **Hurricanes**
Michael and Florence: Winds of 220kph to 250kph

5 **Arctic sea ice**
Second smallest annual maximum, 6th smallest minimum

6 **Europe**
Second warmest year on record after 2016

7 **Algeria**
Temperature record on July 5: 51.3 deg C at Ouargla

8 **Antarctic sea ice**
Fourth smallest annual maximum, 2nd smallest minimum

9 **Asia**
Continental temperature record for March: 45.5 deg C in Pakistan

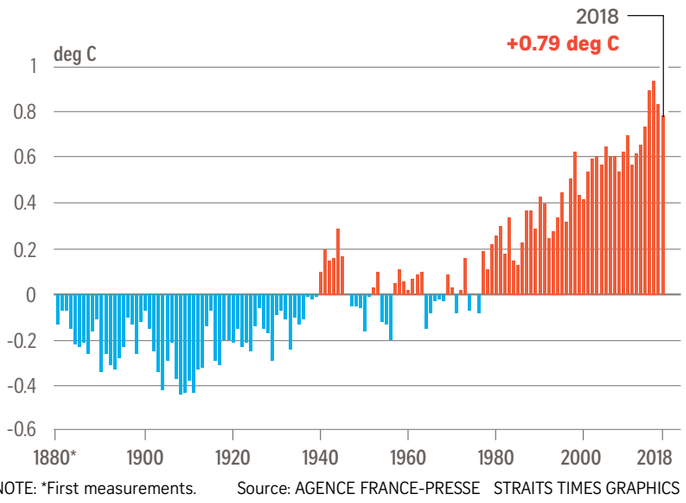
10 **Mariana Islands**
Typhoon Yutu: Winds of 285kph, strongest ever on the islands

11 **Australia**
Third warmest year

12 **New Zealand**
Second warmest year

ANOMALIES IN WORLD TEMPERATURES

Temperature variation compared to the 20th-century average



NOTE: *First measurements. Source: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

WorldBriefs

Abe vows all-out effort to stop child abuse

TOKYO • Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged that the government would make all-out efforts to eradicate child abuse in Japan, the Jiji Press reported.

Wednesday's pledge came in response to a series of child abuse cases which sparked a national backlash, including a case last month, when a 10-year-old elementary school pupil in Noda city, Chiba prefecture, died, allegedly after constant abuse by her father.

Paris recalls envoy in Rome after 'attacks'

PARIS • France has recalled its ambassador in Rome after what Paris described as baseless and repeated attacks from Italy's political leaders in the past months, and urged Italy to return to a more friendly stance.

It said yesterday that Italy's attacks were without precedent since World War II. Italy's two deputy prime ministers, Mr Matteo Salvini of the right-wing League and Mr Luigi Di Maio of the populist, anti-establishment 5-Star movement, have goaded French President Emmanuel Macron on a host of inflammatory issues.

REUTERS

India's Congress would ditch divorce decree

NEW DELHI • India's main opposition Congress party said yesterday it would scrap a decree passed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government prescribing jail terms for Muslim men seeking an instant divorce if the party wins an election due by May.

Mr Modi has said the decree is necessary to empower women, but Congress said it unfairly punished Muslim men. REUTERS

Seoul to have cargo, pet, women-only cabs

SEOUL • Women-only taxis equipped with child car seats and penalty for taxis that refuse passengers based on their destinations will begin running in Seoul as early as this month, the Korean city's government said yesterday.

The Seoul government said it will add more taxis that provide value-added services, for example, taxis that specialise in running errands or carrying cargo, as well as taxis that allow pets on board.

THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Facebook to appeal against German ruling on data collection

BONN • Facebook was yesterday ordered to curb its data collection practices in Germany after a ruling that the world's largest social network had abused its market dominance to gather information about users without their knowledge or consent.

Facebook said it would appeal against the landmark ruling by the Federal Cartel Office, the culmination of a three-year probe, saying the antitrust watchdog underestimated the competition it faced and undermined Europe-wide privacy rules that took effect last year.

"In future, Facebook will no longer be allowed to force its users to agree to the practically unrestricted collection and assigning of non-Facebook data to their Facebook accounts," cartel office chief Andreas Mundt said.

The findings follow fierce global scrutiny of Facebook over a series of privacy lapses, including the leak of data on tens of millions of Facebook users, as well as the extensive use of targeted advertisements by foreign powers seeking to influence elections in the United States.

These have gone down badly with Germans, reflecting broader concerns over personal surveillance that date back to Germany's history of Nazi and Communist rule in the 20th century.

"Users are often unaware of this flow of data and cannot prevent it if they want to use the services," Justice Minister Katarina Barley told Reuters, in welcoming the ruling. "We need to be rigorous in tackling the abuse of power that comes with data."

The cartel office objected in particular to how Facebook pools data on people from third-party apps – including its own WhatsApp and Instagram services – and its online tracking of people who are not even members.

That includes tracking visitors to websites with an embedded Facebook "like" or "share" button – and pages where it observes people even though there is no obvious sign the social network is present.

The ruling does not yet have legal force and Facebook has a month to appeal, which the social network said it would do.

"We disagree with their conclusions and intend to appeal so that people in Germany continue to benefit fully from all our services," Facebook said in a blog post.

"The Bundeskartellamt underestimates the fierce competition we face in Germany, misinterprets our compliance with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), and threatens the mechanism European law provides for ensuring consistent data protection standards across the EU."

In its order, the cartel office said it would be possible to assign data from WhatsApp or Instagram to Facebook only with the voluntary consent of users.

Collecting data from third-party websites and assigning it to Facebook would be allowed only if users give their voluntary consent.

If consent is withheld, Facebook would have to substantially restrict its collection and combining of data, and should develop proposals to do this within 12 months, subject to the outcome of appeal proceedings.

If Facebook fails to comply, the cartel office could impose fines of up to 10 per cent of annual global revenues, which grew by 37 per cent to US$55.8 billion (S$75.7 billion) last year. REUTERS

Britain and EU agree to hold further Brexit talks

More meetings ahead following 'robust' May-Juncker discussion

BRUSSELS • European Union leader Jean-Claude Juncker and British Prime Minister Theresa May agreed yesterday to hold further talks on Britain's withdrawal from the bloc, after what they described as a "robust" meeting.

The EU's Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier will meet Britain's Brexit Minister Stephen Barclay next Monday in Strasbourg, France, and Mrs May and Mr Juncker themselves will meet again before the end of this month, said a spokesman.

In a joint statement issued after Mrs May met Mr Juncker at the EU headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, the pair confirmed that Mr Juncker, who is European Commission president, had warned the British Premier that the Brexit withdrawal deal cannot be renegotiated.

But he "expressed his openness to add wording" to a parallel political declaration laying out ambitions for future EU-British ties if London wants to seek a "more ambitious" closer relationship after Brexit.

But Mrs May urged that the withdrawal agreement itself be changed, and reminded Mr Juncker that the British Parliament had mandated her to seek "a legally binding change to the terms of the backstop". This is a clause in the withdrawal agreement, signed last November, that would keep Britain in the EU Customs union even after a post-Brexit transition period if no way is found to keep the Irish border open.

"The discussion was robust but constructive," the joint statement said. "Despite the challenges, the two leaders agreed that their teams should hold talks as to whether a way through can be found that would gain the broadest possible support in the UK Parliament and respect the guidelines agreed by the European Council."

If no agreement is reached on the withdrawal deal, which has yet to be approved by either the British Parliament or the European Parliament, Britain will crash out of the union with no follow-on trade arrangements on March 29.

Expectations for Mrs May's visit were already modest when, on Wednesday, European Council president Donald Tusk and Mr Juncker torched her prospects of winning changes to the withdrawal agreement.

Mr Juncker told reporters that Mrs May already knew and accepted that the EU would not reopen talks on the deal.

And Mr Tusk, who represents EU member governments as head of the European Council, triggered outrage across the Channel by damning pro-Brexit politicians for, in his view, recklessly failing to plan.

"I've been wondering what that special place in hell looks like, for those who promoted Brexit without even a sketch of a plan on how to carry it out safely," he said.

According to talking points provided by Downing Street ahead of the visit, Mrs May was to admit that securing changes would not be easy. But she was to add: "Last week, Parliament made clear that for the first time it could support the withdrawal agreement, subject to changes to the backstop. The government now wants urgently to work with the EU to secure such changes. The EU shares the UK's commitment to leave with a deal. We must show determination and do what it takes to now get the deal over the line."

Mrs May has exasperated EU leaders by repeatedly coming to Brussels without detailed proposals to solve the Brexit deadlock.

The British Premier will have dinner with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar in Dublin today. Mr Varadkar, whose government has stressed the importance of maintaining an open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit, said that recent "instability in British politics" showed why a backstop was essential.

On Wednesday, Mrs May discussed the issue with Northern Irish leaders in the British province.

Last month, the House of Commons overwhelmingly rejected the Brexit deal that she had negotiated with the EU after 18 months of painstaking diplomacy.

She is now looking into changes to satisfy her MPs, who fear the backstop would keep Britain indefinitely tied to EU rules, with even closer alignment for Northern Ireland. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Protesters with a banner reading "No To A Blindfold Brexit" outside the European Commission HQ in Brussels yesterday. EC president Jean-Claude Juncker "expressed his openness to add wording" to a parallel political declaration laying out ambitions for future EU-British ties if London wants to seek a "more ambitious" closer relationship after Brexit. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Labour sets terms for backing May on Brexit deal

LONDON • British opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn met Prime Minister Theresa May last week and has written her a letter putting forward five demands by his Labour Party on the Brexit deal.

In the letter made public late on Wednesday, Mr Corbyn said the Brexit deal must include a "permanent and comprehensive" United Kingdom-wide Customs union, a close alignment with the single market, "unambiguous agreements" on future security arrangements, and commitments on Britain's participation in European Union agencies and funding programmes.

The Labour leader wrote that the above demands should be put into law before Britain leaves the EU.

Mr Corbyn also reiterated that there must not be a return to a hard border in Northern Ireland, adding that all steps must be taken to avoid a no-deal Brexit.

Mrs May will respond to Mr Corbyn's letter, on his proposals for a Brexit deal, but she has not changed her position that a Customs union with the EU should be ruled out, her spokesman said yesterday.

The spokesman also told reporters that Mrs May was focused on securing changes to the so-called Northern Irish backstop arrangement to prevent the return of a hard border in Ireland in order to try and win the support of Parliament for her deal.

Last month, British lawmakers rejected Mrs May's original deal that set out the terms by which Britain would exit the EU. They voted to demand that Mrs May seek changes to the treaty.

Britain is due to leave EU on March 29.

Mrs May travelled to Brussels yesterday to tell EU leaders that they must accept legally binding changes to the Irish border arrangements of the divorce deal or face the prospect of a disorderly no-deal Brexit. REUTERS

The scooter ride-share craze in the US, which began in late 2017, has led to over 1,500 cases of injuries, says Consumer Reports. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

E-scooter craze leaves trail of injuries in US: Survey

WASHINGTON • More than 1,500 people have been treated for injuries from using battery-powered electric scooters in the United States since the craze began in late 2017, a Consumer Reports survey showed.

The non-profit consumer magazine said its tally, based on reports from hospitals and emergency officials, is incomplete and does not include four reported fatalities linked to e-scooters.

Still, it counted 1,542 cases of emergency treatment for scooter-related injuries after contacting 110 hospitals and five agencies in 47 cities where the two biggest scooter companies operate.

The scooter ride-share craze, which enables consumers to rent the two-wheeled devices for short trips, has been hailed as a potential revolution for urban transport.

But a number of media reports have highlighted the potential dangers of scooter use either on pavements on city streets or on roads.

This week, a 21-year-old Irish exchange student died after being struck by a car while on his scooter in Austin, Texas, according to the media.

Consumer Reports, which released its report on Tuesday, said hospitals treated people for concussions, nasal fractures, forearm fractures and other injuries, some requiring surgery.

While major e-scooter firms encourage users to wear helmets, there are few regulations requiring them.

The magazine said more than half of those contacted in the survey had no detailed data for scooter injuries, and that it was not possible to calculate the rate of incidents for distance travelled.

Two US-based start-ups, Bird and Lime, have been growing rapidly, including internationally, and have reached valuations of more than US$1 billion (S$1.35 billion).

It may be complicated to assess the safety of scooters compared with bicycles, for example, without better data on how many people use scooters.

Mr Paul White, director of safety at Bird, said the injury figures lack context and do not take into account that scooters reduce car traffic.

"Driving is much deadlier for everyone, as evidenced by the 6,000 pedestrians killed on US roads in 2017," he said.

"We are proud to provide a transportation alternative that gets people out of cars – not only to reduce car-related fatalities, but to be part of a climate solution that will move cities forward into a safer, smarter future for us all."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

OPINION

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says

Keeping Merdeka spirit alive

The decision to widen the beneficiaries of the Merdeka Generation Package to beyond the 500,000 Singaporeans born in the 1950s pays tribute to those who were also part of an extraordinary rite of passage in Singapore's history. Like the Pioneer Generation Package, which acknowledges the contributions of Singaporeans born in 1949 or earlier and who received citizenship by 1986, the latest initiative on the Merdeka Generation – Singaporeans aged between 60 and 69 this year – recognises the contribution made by mostly ordinary people to the consolidation and evolution of an unsuspected national identity.

The pioneer generation lived in the territory that is Singapore today, but they did not inhabit a country. Many were immigrants who, or whose forebears, arrived on these shores as sojourners with hopes of returning to their ancestral lands to live better. It was the Merdeka Generation which oversaw Singapore's transition from place to nation by taking its transplanted roots seriously enough to face life and take on the challenges of becoming a nation. That psychological transition included overcoming attacks on a nascent national identity from the left and right, by communists and communalists, on the way to independence in 1965. Since then, Singapore has been tested severely on economic, racial and religious grounds. But it has pulled through, underpinned by the belief that independence is for keeps.

As the largest ethnic community, Chinese Singaporeans played an incomparable role in the formation of the Merdeka identity. They did so by making their ethnic inheritance, drawn ultimately from China, a part of Singapore's destiny. Distancing themselves from China's long historical trajectory, they transformed their diasporic past into one that is distinct and particular to Singapore, helping shape the country's destiny in the process. They shared with their Malay, Indian and Eurasian Merdeka Generation peers a keen sense of Singapore as a multiracial nation. While communities upheld and celebrated their ethnicities, they also translated racial and religious diversity into an integrative Singaporean culture.

The degree to which Singapore's communities remain distinct from their ethnic counterparts in "mother countries" will help to determine national coherence and resilience in an era of disruptive change. The economic rise of several Asian countries, prominently China and India, may well recreate the continent's ascendancy, once lost to the onset of colonialism. However, these trends could well be accompanied by a resurgence of identity politics centred on Asian ethnicities. Singaporeans must remain rooted even as they go global, staying open to the world while abjuring the centrifugal attractions of identity politics. At the end of the day, Singapore matters to the world because it is distinct and independent.

SpeakingOfAsia

Decisive turn in the road for India's Priyanka

Congress party is relying on her star power and Gandhi family name to revive its fortunes. It will not be an easy road ahead but there is no turning back.

Ravi Velloor
Associate Editor

This week in New Delhi, a fresh nameplate went up on the wall of the room next to that of the president of Indian National Congress, the country's oldest political party. And it reads: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

In a few days, the newest general secretary of Congress, now run by her older brother Rahul Gandhi, will address her first public rally outside the two rural constituencies in Uttar Pradesh (UP) state that she managed for Rahul and their Italian-born mother Sonia Gandhi. This, she will do in Lucknow, the state capital.

Politically the most important of the vast nation's 29 provinces, UP sends no less than 80 MPs to the 543-seat national legislature. The state has produced more prime ministers than any other province, including three from the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty alone – founding premier Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv, father of Rahul and Priyanka.

In the last parliamentary elections, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and allies, riding on a tidal wave of support for Mr Narendra Modi, won 73 of the seats. Although his roots are in western Gujarat state, Mr Modi also chose to represent the state, winning by a landslide in the Gangetic town of Varanasi, holy to Hindus. Congress had two seats in UP – the ones held by the Gandhi mother and son – in a total of 44 parliamentary seats, its lowest tally.

Congress' morale has significantly improved after its strong showing in three recent state elections, where it winkled out incumbent BJP administrations, and the party is hoping that Priyanka will now boost its fortunes in parliamentary polls due by May.

Her surprise induction into the national campaign and subsequent elevation as general secretary has gone down well with Congress-wallahs who see it as an inspired move. Forgotten is that Rahul had started out signalling he was determined to build the party from the ground up, including holding democratic elections for key posts.

In the decade past when the clamour to draft Priyanka into politics had grown louder and louder within Congress ranks, the word put out was that her son and daughter were her first priority.

But her children are now poised to exit their teens, and that frees her up to "help out" – the favoured expression for when the next Gandhi enters the family business. With the winds seemingly at the party's back, the signs are propitious for her political career.

Hence, there is more than ordinary curiosity about next week's rally, which, in many ways, will frame the contest for the looming battle in the world's biggest democracy. Having unsurprisingly reached into the all-too-familiar quiver of the Gandhi household for the arrow to nail Mr Modi, Congress' attack strategy will likely surface in Priyanka's speech.

THE INDIRA FACTOR

If media attention is a useful yardstick, Priyanka would be hugely popular. India's frenetic media is in a lather over the prospects of the slender, short-haired, 47-year-old woman given charge of the Congress campaign in the politically vital eastern half of UP, which includes the district from which Mr Modi was elected to Parliament, and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to the state assembly.

Many believe she is much more of a natural politician than her older brother. Gushing parallels are drawn between Priyanka and her grandmother Indira, for her looks, determination and flair.

Indira, assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, won nationwide admiration as a tough leader who effectively ended any threat from hostile neighbour Pakistan by splintering that nation in two.

Commentators speak enthusiastically of Priyanka's natural charm, wit and empathy.

Her visit last week to a shanty home located behind her brother's government bungalow to inquire about a polio-stricken lad drew national headlines and was treated as emblematic of the Gandhi clan's abiding concern for the downtrodden.

She is also adept at repartee. When Mr Modi stormed around in 2014 describing Congress as a "123-year-old hag", her response was to ask the crowds : "Do my mother and I look old to you?"

Yet, when Mr Modi played on the theme of Gandhi family nepotism and called Congress an "RSVP" organisation – for Rahul, Sonia, Vadra, Priyanka – she was noticeably defensive, responding that Indians didn't need schooling in "ABCD".

Add it all up and she has, without question, added a frisson of excitement to the looming battle.

BJP'S DILEMMA

The BJP is torn between ignoring and attacking her. But it cannot also chance her turning out to be a big draw in eastern UP, thus forcing Mr Modi to focus more on the region rather than forage for votes nationwide.

The unwritten code that top politicians adopt a live-and-let-live attitude and not get in the way of the individual electoral chances of their rivals was given short shrift in the last election. Thus, Mr Modi may end up having to face Priyanka in his home turf Varanasi, electrifying the battle.

Anyone who wishes India well will recognise that Congress is the only all-India outfit that reflects the country's basic instincts, whether it is a broadly tolerant attitude towards minorities or a centrist approach to international affairs.

That great tradition, fashioned by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, has visibly been under siege under BJP. India's minorities, particularly, would feel a lot more comfortable if Congress were to regain significant national influence.

REALITY CHECK

The problem, though, is that those cheering on Priyanka may be allowing their optimism to get ahead of ground realities.

To begin with, Congress may be fancying its chances in UP a trifle overmuch.

The two powerful regional groups that now dominate the state's politics have announced an electoral alliance to take on BJP. Given that the BJP is reckoned to have a solid third of the vote base, a three-way fight could only splinter the anti-BJP vote. Expecting Congress to repeat its 2009 performance, when it won 18 seats of the 40 in eastern UP, would seem a stretch.

Second, Priyanka's supposed resemblance to Indira – that this is a major pull with voters – is overstated. Aside from wearing her hair short and wrapping herself in cotton saris like her grandmother, the two do not look all that similar. At 1.73m, she is 10cm taller than her grandmother. If anything, she resembles her late father Rajiv more, especially when she smiles.

And even if she does resemble Indira, so what? Two-thirds of Indians are below age 40 and have no real memories of Indira.

Indeed, Priyanka may be better off staying focused on the two family constituencies rather than spreading herself too thin. With its grassroots organisation in tatters across the Hindi-speaking heartland, Congress is on the ropes, even in seemingly secure Rae Bareilly and Amethi, the seats Priyanka has managed for Sonia and Rahul.

Unlike the tireless Mr Modi, who has visited Varanasi no fewer than two dozen times since his election, the Gandhis tend to nurse their bailiwicks less assiduously.

In 2014, Rahul's victory margin in Amethi slumped to a quarter of what he tallied in the 2009 election. Today, in the five state assembly wards that make up the parliamentary constituency, Congress controls not even one.

In Sonia's Rae Bareilly next door, Congress has just one of the five state seats.

Sure, some voters may be fired up by Priyanka's personality. Equally, others will agree with the BJP refrain that her induction is a sign of Rahul's "weakness" as a leader.

The nameplate that went up in the Congress headquarters with Priyanka's married name holds clues to another family predicament.

Mr Robert Vadra, Priyanka's husband, is a controversial businessman whose fortunes significantly improved during the decade that a Congress-led government held power in New Delhi from 2004.

The High Court in Rajasthan state, where he apparently has business interests, recently lifted a stay on the questioning of Mr Vadra and his mother Maureen in a case filed under the Preventing of Money Laundering Act. This week, Mr Vadra appeared before the Enforcement Directorate for questioning, with his wife dropping him off at its offices in a gesture of spousal support.

DANGER OF DISMISSING WOMEN

Still, it is not that Prime Minister Modi is entirely invincible from the Priyanka effect. His popularity rests on a solid phalanx of support from women voters who, no doubt, could be swayed by the charisma of the attractive Congress candidate and eye her with sympathy. As a keen student of political history, he would also be aware that it does not pay to underestimate the Gandhi women.

In the late 1960s, not long after Pandit Nehru's death, an old-boy herd of Congress elephants dubbed the "Syndicate" tried to capture Congress, dismissing Indira as a "dumb doll". Her decisive response was to split Congress and emerge to dominate party and nation. Likewise, the late Narasimha Rao, handpicked for the prime minister's job by Sonia in 1991, paid a massive price for not paying court subsequently to the widow grieving over her assassinated husband.

And, finally, there is the question about Priyanka's personality.

Outside the five-year election cycle when she morphs into her gregarious, sassy self, she is a private person, often spotted shopping alone.

Of the two Gandhi siblings, she has had more difficulty exorcising the ghosts that haunt them, particularly the assassinations of their grandmother and father. Finding comfort in Buddhism, she once travelled to a prison in Tamil Nadu state to meet one of the women who had plotted her father's assassination.

Perhaps, as her nest empties, it might be different this time and she will find the stamina for a sustained involvement in national affairs. Like it or not, one thing is clear – there is a new soldier in the fight and this is one continuous war. There now can be no going back for Priyanka.

velloor@sph.com.sg

Can there be good billionaires?

The super-rich are in the spotlight as targets of US Democrats aiming to fix the growing wealth divide

Farhad Manjoo

Last autumn, Mr Tom Scocca, editor of the blog Hmm Daily, wrote a tiny, searing post that has been rattling around my head ever since.

"Some ideas about how to make the world better require careful, nuanced thinking about how best to balance competing interests," he began. "Others don't: Billionaires are bad. We should presumptively get rid of billionaires. All of them."

Mr Scocca – a long-time writer at Gawker until that site was muffled by a billionaire – offered a straightforward argument for kneecapping the wealthiest among us.

A billion dollars is wildly more than anyone needs, even accounting for life's most excessive lavishes. It's far more than anyone might reasonably claim to deserve, however much he believes he has contributed to society. At some level of extreme wealth, money inevitably corrupts.

On the left and the right, it buys political power, it silences dissent, it serves primarily to perpetuate ever-greater wealth, often unrelated to any reciprocal social good. For Mr Scocca, that level is self-evidently somewhere around US$1 billion (S$1.36 billion); beyond that, you're irredeemable.

I cover technology, an industry that belches up new billionaires annually, and much of my career has required a deep anthropological inquiry into billionairedom.

But I am embarrassed to say I had never before considered Mr Scocca's idea – that if we aimed, through public and social policy, simply to discourage people from attaining and possessing more than a billion in lucre, just about everyone would be better off.

In my defence, back in October, abolishing billionaires felt way out there. It sounded radical, impossible, maybe even unAmerican, and even Mr Scocca seemed to float the notion as a mere reverie.

CALLS FOR HIGHER TAXES

But it is an illustration of the political precariousness of billionaires that the idea has since become something like mainline thought on the progressive left.

United States senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are floating new taxes aimed at the super-rich, including special rates for billionaires. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who also favours higher taxes on the wealthy, has been making a moral case against the existence of billionaires.

Mr Dan Riffle, her policy adviser, recently changed his Twitter name to "Every Billionaire Is A Policy Failure". Last week, HuffPost asked: "Should billionaires even exist?"

I suspect the question is getting so much attention because the answer is obvious: Nope.

Billionaires should not exist – at least not in their present numbers, with their current globe-swallowing power, garnering this level of adulation, while the rest of the economy scrapes by.

Let us explore the maximalist policy visions – positions we might aspire to over time rather than push through tomorrow. Abolishing billionaires might not sound like a practical idea, but if you think about it as a long-term goal in the light of today's deepest economic ills, it feels anything but radical.

Instead, banishing billionaires – seeking to cut their economic power, working to reduce their political power and attempting to question their social status – is a pithy, perfectly encapsulated vision for surviving the digital future.

Billionaire abolishment could take many forms. It could mean preventing people from keeping more than a billion in booty, but more likely, it would mean higher marginal taxes on income, wealth and estates for billionaires and people on the way to becoming billionaires.

These policy ideas turn out to poll very well, even if they're probably not actually redistributive enough to turn most billionaires into sub-billionaires.

More importantly, aiming to abolish billionaires would involve reshaping the structure of the digital economy so that it produces a more equitable ratio of super-rich to the rest of us.

TECH-ENABLED RICHES

Inequality is the defining economic condition of the tech age. Software, by its very nature, drives concentrations of wealth. Through network effects, in which the very popularity of a service ensures that it keeps getting more popular, and unprecedented economies of scale – in which Amazon can make Alexa once and have it work everywhere, for everyone – tech instils a winner-take-all dynamic across much of the economy.

We are already seeing these effects now. A few superstar corporations, many in tech, account for the bulk of American corporate profits, while most of the share of economic growth since the 1970s has gone to a small number of the country's richest people.

But the problem is poised to get worse. Artificial intelligence is creating prosperous new industries that don't employ very many workers; left unchecked, technology is creating a world where a few billionaires control an unprecedented share of global wealth.

But abolishment does not involve only economic policy. It might also take the form of social and political opprobrium. For at least 20 years, we've been in a devastating national love affair with billionaires – a dalliance that the tech industry has championed more than any other.

I have witnessed a generation of striving entrepreneurs join the three-comma club and instantly transform into superheroes of the global order, celebrated from the Bay Area to Beijing for what's taken to be their obvious and irrefutable wisdom about anything and everything.

American billionaires include (from top) investor Warren Buffett, technopreneur Elon Musk and United States President Donald Trump. PHOTOS: REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

The adulation we heap upon billionaires obscures the plain moral quandary at the centre of their wealth: Why should anyone have a billion dollars, why should anyone be proud to brandish their billions, when there is so much suffering in the world?

We put billionaires on magazine covers, speculate about their political ambitions, praise their grand visions to save the world and wink affectionately at their wacky plans to help us escape – thanks to their very huge and not-in-any-way-Freudianly-suggestive rockets – to a new one.

But the adulation we heap upon billionaires obscures the plain moral quandary at the centre of their wealth: Why should anyone have a billion dollars, why should anyone be proud to brandish their billions, when there is so much suffering in the world?

As Ms Ocasio-Cortez put it in a conversation with writer Ta-Nehisi Coates: "I'm not saying that Bill Gates or Warren Buffett is immoral, but a system that allows billionaires to exist when there are parts of Alabama where people are still getting ringworm because they don't have access to public health is wrong." (She meant hookworm, she later corrected.)

WHAT ABOUT GATES AND BUFFETT?

Last week, to dig into this question of whether it was possible to be a good billionaire, I called up two experts. The first was Professor Peter Singer, the Princeton moral philosopher who has written extensively about the ethical duties of the rich.

Prof Singer said that in general, he did not think it was possible to live morally as a billionaire, though he made a few exceptions: Mr Gates and Mr Buffett, who have pledged to give away the bulk of their wealth to philanthropy, would not earn his scorn. But most billionaires are not so generous; of the 2,200 or so billionaires in the world – about 500 of whom are American – fewer than 200 have signed the Giving Pledge created by Mr and Mrs Bill and Melinda Gates and Mr Buffett.

"I have a moral concern with the conduct of individuals – we have many billionaires who are not living ethically, and are not doing nearly as much good as they can, by a wide margin," Prof Singer said.

Then there is the additional complication of whether even the ones who are "doing good" are actually doing good.

As writer Anand Giridharadas has argued, many billionaires approach philanthropy as a kind of branding exercise to maintain a system in which they get to keep their billions. When a billionaire commits to putting money into politics – whether it's Mr Howard Schultz or Mr Michael Bloomberg or Mr Sheldon Adelson, whether it's for your team or the other – you should see the plan for what it is: An effort to gain some leverage over the political system, a scheme to short-circuit the revolution and blunt the advancing pitchforks.

This brings me to my second expert on the subject, Mr Tom Steyer, the former hedge-fund investor who is devoting his billion-dollar fortune to a passel of progressive causes, like voter registration and climate change, and impeaching Mr Donald Trump.

Mr Steyer ticks every liberal box. He favours a wealth tax, and he and his wife have signed the Giving Pledge. He doesn't live excessively lavishly – he drives a Chevy Volt. Still, I wondered when I got on the phone with him last week: Wouldn't we be better off if we didn't have to worry about rich people like him trying to alter the political process?

Mr Steyer was affable and loquacious; he spoke to me for nearly an hour about his interest in economic justice and his belief in grassroots organising.

At one point, I compared his giving with that of the Koch brothers, and he seemed genuinely pained by the comparison. "I understand about the real issues of money in politics," he said. "We have a system that I know is not right, but it's the one we got, and we're trying as hard as possible to change it."

I admire his zeal. But if we tolerate the supposedly "good" billionaires in politics, we inevitably leave open the door for the bad ones. And the bad ones will overrun us.

When American capitalism sends us its billionaires, it's not sending its best. It's sending us people who have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They are bringing inequality. They are bringing injustice. They are buying politicians. And some, I assume, are good people. NYTIMES

Need to maintain trust with people living with HIV

Sophia Archuleta and Wong Chen Seong

For The Straits Times

On Jan 28, news broke that the personal details of 14,200 individuals had been stolen from Singapore's HIV Registry, and subsequently leaked online.

As doctors who care for people living with HIV and their loved ones, and members of the Society of Infectious Disease (Singapore), we were dismayed as our patients, whose confidential information was compromised, started to call in to our clinics in shock, disbelief and distress.

In the days following, much has happened. There has been an increase of activity among civic society and individuals alike, almost universally expressing support and solidarity for those now living in fear that their intimate medical and personal details may be public knowledge.

There is debate ongoing on a range of issues related to the matter, such as the legal frameworks surrounding HIV and those affected by it, the role of mandatory HIV notification, and the security of medical informatics systems in our rapidly changing healthcare landscape.

Our priority as healthcare professionals has been working hard to ensure that those under our care are safe and supported during these extraordinary times. Doctors, as well as nurses, medical social workers and other front-line staff, have been on the ground, addressing the many questions that patients have, as well as providing counselling and reassurance to those particularly distressed. This is, of course, an extension of the work we already do, and the calling we already heed: providing holistic, comprehensive and compassionate care for a group of people on the margins of society.

As a community of practitioners providing care for people living with HIV (PLHIV), we want to assure Singaporeans, especially patients and family members, that we will work hard to make sure that PLHIV in Singapore receive the highest standard of care that is multi-disciplinary and holistic, with the aim of ensuring their physical and psychological health.

This care is being provided by a number of public healthcare institutions, and comprises not merely specialist HIV clinical care, but also primary care, psychosocial support services and allied health services.

The goals of HIV care go beyond the prolonging of life, to include the assurance of quality of life. Prevention of HIV infection is also of vital importance, and we pursue this through traditional and innovative prevention strategies.

Close cooperation between care providers, community-based organisations with a focus on HIV, policymakers and public institutions, academics and researchers, and most importantly, affected populations, is needed to ensure the continued success of HIV care programmes in Singapore.

PLHIV also need society to fight HIV-related stigma and discrimination. The stigma of HIV/AIDS and the discrimination faced by those who live with it remain a pressing problem today. Most patients under our care still keep their diagnosis a secret from friends and family; many fear rejection at work, school or home.

One of the core values guiding the provision of HIV care is that PLHIV should be treated with dignity and respect. We can reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination in Singapore by raising awareness of key messages.

First, that PLHIV can live healthy, happy and productive lives of normal life expectancy if they are started on, and remain on, effective anti-retroviral therapy. HIV is no longer a life-limiting diagnosis, and with access to treatment, people living with HIV are no different from people living with other chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. However, this can be achieved only if people at risk of infection come forth for testing, and if tested positive, come forth for treatment. We believe this is best achieved through increasing knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS, and reducing the stigma associated with the disease.

Second, that HIV infection cannot be transmitted through casual contact. There is now incontrovertible evidence to show that HIV-infected people who are on effective treatment have undetectable levels of virus in their blood, making it impossible for them to transmit the infection to others – a paradigm now known as Undetectable = Untransmittable, or U=U.

Hence, we strongly feel that workplaces, schools and other public institutions should take the lead in treating people living with HIV fairly and equally, and protect their rights to employment, education, access to care, and service to society.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that HIV infection does not discriminate, and can affect people of any sex, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Our patients come from the whole spectrum of society – young and old, man and woman, of every sexual orientation and socioeconomic class. Just as we should not treat people differently based on any of these characteristics, neither should HIV status subject any person to discriminatory treatment.

We are aware that much needs to be done in the light of the damage of recent days, and to maintain the trust of our key constituents – namely, people living with HIV to whom we provide care. This will not happen overnight, but is a task the importance of which cannot be overstated.

By recommitting to the objectives set out above, we hope to build a strong and trusting relationship with people living with HIV. Recent events have shown how much fear and taboo still exist around HIV. It is our belief that by working together, we can overcome the challenges ahead, and make life better for all, regardless of HIV status.

stopinion@sph.com.sg

• Sophia Archuleta is associate professor and Wong Chen Seong is adjunct assistant professor, both with the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. They are also both members of the Society of Infectious Disease (Singapore).

Canada may be one of the world's more boring countries, as yawn-inspiring as sensible shoes... but it's also emerging as a moral leader of the free world. There is no one else. The United States under President Donald Trump is on a nationalist tear. Britain's leaders seem determined to drag their people over a Brexit precipice. France is distracted by protests. Germany is preparing for succession. So, Canada is stepping up.

Three cheers for Canada's quiet leadership

Nicholas Kristof

After Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland tweeted concern about Saudi Arabia's imprisoning of a women's rights activist, the Crown Prince there seemed to go nuts. Saudi Arabia announced that it was expelling Canada's ambassador, halting flights to Canada, ending purchases of Canadian wheat, recalling students from Canada and selling off Canadian assets.

Did the United States or other Western countries stand up for an old friend and ally, Canada? Not a bit. "The United States doesn't have to get involved," then State Department spokesman Heather Nauert told reporters.

Yet, Canada stuck to its principles.

When a young Saudi woman, Ms Rahaf Mohammed Alqunun, fled to Bangkok last month and warned that she would be killed by her family if she was forced home, it was Canada that again braved Saudi fury by accepting her. Ms Freeland was at the airport to welcome Ms Alqunun as a "very brave new Canadian". And Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did not mince words, saying: "We'll stand up for human rights and women's rights around the world."

Canada may be one of the world's more boring countries, as yawn-inspiring as sensible shoes – wake up, reader, I know you're snoozing! – but it's also emerging as a moral leader of the free world.

There is no one else. The US under President Donald Trump is on a nationalist tear. Britain's leaders seem determined to drag their people over a Brexit precipice. France is distracted by protests. Germany is preparing for succession. So, Canada is stepping up. During the worst of the Syrian refugee crisis, then US President Barack Obama admitted just 12,000 Syrians and provoked a furious backlash, including Mr Trump's Muslim ban.

Canada accepted 40,000 Syrians, with Mr Trudeau appearing at the airport to hand out winter coats to these new Canadians. All around the world, doors to refugees were clanging shut. But Canadians were so eager to sponsor Syrians that organisations were clamouring for more of them.

Canadian politicians are mostly rewarded for showing compassion. Mr Trump gets headlines with his periodic threats to invade Venezuela to topple President Nicolas Maduro, but Canada has been quietly working since 2017 to help organise the Lima Group of 14 nations pushing for democracy in Venezuela.

When Canada recognised the opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president, he won credibility because nobody sees Ottawa as an imperialist conspirator.

Canada has spoken up about the mass detention of about one million Muslims in the Xinjiang region of China even as Muslim countries have mostly kept mum, and it detained a Chinese executive at the request of the US government.

China retaliated by arresting Canadians and sentencing one to death, but Canada is sticking to its guns – even as Mr Trump undercut Canada by suggesting that the case against the executive might be dropped for political reasons.

For aid programmes in the developing world, countries usually try to finance big, glamorous projects that will get lots of attention.

Instead, Canada champions programmes that are extremely cost-effective but so deathly boring that they will never be discussed on TV – initiatives like iodising salt to prevent mental impairment. Reader! Wake up!

Still, Canadians can be devious. A couple of years ago, I sought an interview with Mr Trudeau for a piece about Canada's successes – and he kept stalling.

Aides explained that praise from an American might damage his relations with Mr Trump. That may have been the first time I have had a leader resist laudatory coverage.

Whenever I say something nice about Canada, I get indignant e-mails from Canadian friends pointing out the country's shortcomings (which are real).

Fortunately, Canadians do not seem capable of mean e-mails. Not even of mean tweets.

One study found that Americans' tweets are loaded with curses and words like "hate"; Canadians' tweets are larded with "awesome", "amazing" and "great". (Note: Ignore all the bits about Canadians being nice when playing hockey with them. In the rink, they're brutes.)

Off the ice, Canadians pursue policies that are preternaturally sensible. Canadians regulate guns, oversee the banking sector so as to avoid financial crashes, and nurture entrepreneurship and economic growth without enormous inequality. Typically, more Canadians use mass transit, and the country has better traffic safety laws, so the vehicle fatality rate there is half that of the US'.

If the US had Canada's traffic death rate, we would save more than 20,000 American lives a year.

Today, there's a vacuum of constructive global leadership.

Canada may be incapable of a mean tweet, but it's tough when necessary – and it may be the leader the world needs. NYTIMES

Saudi teenager Rahaf Mohammed Alqunun being welcomed by Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland (right) when she arrived at the Pearson International airport in Toronto last month. The teenager fled to Bangkok last month and warned that she would be killed by her family if she was forced to go home. Canada braved Saudi fury and granted her asylum. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Even the right American is wrong for the World Bank

Mihir Sharma

In many ways, Mr David Malpass, whom US President Donald Trump nominated on Wednesday to head the World Bank, is an unsurprising choice. He is a senior Treasury official overseeing international affairs. Plus, his background screams "Trump nominee": He is not a woman (Ms Indra Nooyi, formerly of PepsiCo, was being considered); and he is an outspoken critic of the institution he is now to head (recall Mr Scott Pruitt's tenure at the Environmental Protection Agency).

He has a controversial Wall Street background (he was chief economist at the ill-fated Bear Stearns), as well as some embarrassing calls in his past (he wrote a Wall Street Journal article in 2007 insisting that the housing market could not pull down the broader economy).

Even so, this is the moment when the US reign over the World Bank must end. Europe, which gets to pick the International Monetary Fund's head in return for ceding the World Bank choice to the United States, should vote with emerging market nations in order to ensure that, for the first time, a nominee from the rest of the world runs the bank.

Ironically, there is a germ of a good idea in Mr Malpass' appointment. Some of the criticisms levied against him by the development policy community are, in fact, good reasons for him to have the job. In particular, he has got three big things right.

First, he acknowledges that the World Bank must diversify away from its decades-old fight against extreme poverty. That became its focus under Mr Robert McNamara, at a time when there was little attention and less capacity devoted to understanding what kept people in the developing world poor.

In the years since 1990, though, the world has made great strides in eradicating poverty. It is now time to focus on the bank's original purpose and one of the biggest constraints on the developing world becoming rich: The shortage of infrastructure.

Second, Mr Malpass knows that China's lending in the developing world is a problem. In testimony before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee a few months ago, he argued that "China's use of non-market export credits, opaque financing and exclusive procurement practices often benefits the donor more than the recipient and undermines debt sustainability, domestic institutions, and environmental and social standards". This is exactly right, and both the financial and development communities need to understand that this is a challenge that must be answered, not ignored.

Finally, Mr Malpass understands how the World Bank's role in developing nations needs to change. In that same testimony, he argued that multilateral development banks "need to focus more on the quality of their project loans, rather than the quantity, and on helping developing countries get their policy environment right for using private capital inflows effectively".

The truth is that the amount of private capital in the world available to build sustainable, climate change-ready infrastructure dwarfs the amount the World Bank and its peers can put into the field. They need to transition to working more closely with private capital if they are to become truly transformative.

And yet, even if these are the right instincts, this is the wrong way to get them on the agenda. Multilateral development agencies are precisely that – multilateral. Everyone needs to be on board, and we cannot afford to have these ideas tainted by association with "America First".

More importantly, if the World Bank is truly to respond to the needs of new, emerging and developing economies, then it needs to be led by someone with direct experience of those nations and their priorities.

As former Indian central banker Raghuram Rajan noted as long ago as 2008, multilateral agencies have to "encourage (development) strategy formulation" by host governments. They need to be impartial, sometimes combative, policy advisers. This will not work if they are still seen as pawns of the West.

Changing who runs the World Bank would be the strongest possible message that it is no longer beholden to America or Europe. Yes, the US is its largest shareholder, and it has made itself more accountable to its host countries. Still, a bank for the world must be governed by the world. BLOOMBERG

Beware of cars with minds of their own

Cities considering driverless cars will have to factor in impact on parking and congestion

Leonid Bershidsky

Predictions that autonomous cars powered by artificial intelligence will create a safer, more harmonious world may be off base: That's because the new thinking technology will respond to different incentives from humans, and that won't necessarily lead to better outcomes.

Figuring out what the streets will be like once they're owned by driverless cars isn't an exact science, but some researchers have run game theory-based simulations or real-life experiments to try to work it out.

A trial described in a 2018 paper by researcher Xiang Ji of the North China Electric Power University predicts that driverless vehicles will reduce congestion: Because they communicate with one another all the time, the cars will know when a street is congested and will pick an alternative route.

Another paper, by a team of researchers led by Dr Daniel Work of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, argued that autonomous vehicles capable of optimising their speed to avoid stopping would put an end to irritating stop-and-go waves.

Another argument in favour of self-driving cars' ability to decrease congestion is that they reduce the need for parking spaces: The cars won't wait for you but will just go off to pick up another passenger. That, however, could cause other problems, as Associate Professor Adam Millard-Ball of the University of California, Santa Cruz showed in a recent paper.

The autonomous vehicles' behaviour, he wrote, would most likely be economically driven.

They would decide whether to park (and if so, where) or to keep going on the basis of cost.

Parking is expensive in city centres today: In downtown Sydney, leaving one's car for eight hours costs about US$47 (S$64).

Imagine an autonomous vehicle owned by an individual rather than a taxi fleet. This car would be able to avoid the high fees by going to a less congested area outside the city centre to wait for its owner. It could also rely on more crafty behaviour, stopping at a series of spots where parking is free only for a time or even standing next to a meter and driving off if a security officer arrives. Finally, it could go home and wait there.

All these behaviours would dramatically increase the amount of driving around done by empty cars. But, worst of all, it might be economically justified for the self-driving vehicles just to keep cruising without parking anywhere – the way drivers picking up a passenger at an airport drive around the terminal when they want to avoid paying for short-term parking.

Cruising is cheaper at slower speeds, according to Prof Millard-Ball: "AVs (autonomous vehicles) trying to pass time by cruising, and doing so at the least cost, will seek out congested traffic. This is particularly true for battery-electric vehicles, where the efficiency penalty for slower speeds is less than for vehicles with internal-combustion petrol engines."

Moving very slowly in a traffic jam would cost as little as 29 US cents an hour in San Francisco, Prof Millard-Ball's model showed; moving at 14kmh, the average for the evening rush hour in that city in 2017, would imply a cost of US$1.98 an hour. That is cheaper than downtown parking – and often more efficient than driving a few kilometres to park in a cheaper area.

Prof Millard-Ball calculated that cruising while waiting for the owner-passenger would be the most cost-effective option for 40 per cent of trips to downtown San Francisco. Fewer than 4,000 autonomous vehicles would be enough to slow certain streets to about 1.6kmh – an excellent, cost-effective speed for a waiting vehicle.

It's more likely, of course, that most self-driving cars won't belong to individual owners but to fleets. That, according to Prof Millard-Ball, would partially mitigate the potential problem but not solve it: A shared AV fleet would still render city-centre parking charges impotent as a constraint on vehicle travel, as the traveller would not have to pay.

Moreover, just as today's taxis and ride-hailing vehicles often park during periods of lower demand, a fleet of shared AVs would require parking or would cruise around during off-peak times.

It would be interesting to see how a self-driving car caught in a "mobile parking lot" of slow-moving vehicles would get to the owner, or to the next passenger, on time.

Prof Millard-Ball doesn't discuss it, but then that probably wouldn't be a concern in the car's initial parking cost calculation. There would be ways for cities to alter the self-driving cars' behaviour by adjusting parking prices to make cruising uneconomical. But that would likely mean creating more downtown spaces for them to wait out off-peak hours. Cities would lose parking pricing as an important way to discourage driving to city centres. It would require a separate model to figure out how that would affect congestion.

Even if Prof Millard-Ball is wrong, his model is off or autonomous vehicles are built to avoid disruptive behaviours like finding the most congested streets and cruising in circles instead of parking, the researcher's mental exercise is still useful.

When imagining the effects of vehicle autonomy on our lives, we need to try thinking like artificial intelligence, not like humans.

Then, potential will emerge for all kinds of strange, counter-intuitive behaviours. The best way to take advantage of self-driving capabilities would be for humans to keep more control – for example, by allowing autonomy only for public minivans and buses in dedicated lanes – a concept promoted by urban planner Peter Calthrope as "autonomous rapid transit".

It would ensure that self-driving vehicles never circulate without passengers, and it would greatly increase the efficiency of public transportation by fitting capacity to demand. Best of all, it wouldn't let artificial intelligence get too creative for humans' good. BLOOMBERG

The US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. Under the common law system in the United States, Britain and several other countries, the validity of legal arguments depends heavily on precedent. Legal analytics companies have been used in certain cases to give lawyers an edge in lawsuits and trials, and are expanding into a broad range of areas of commercial law. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

How will the judge decide? Law firms look to big data

Legal experts and computer scientists are developing tools they believe will give lawyers an edge by data-mining past decisions to predict judicial outcomes

Barney Thompson

For the lawyers who ply their trade in the US District Court for the Northern District of California, the ability to read the mind of Judge Richard Seeborg would be extremely useful.

Until a few years ago, trying to predict how he or any other judge might rule depended on encountering them enough times in court, or exchanging tips with colleagues on which arguments the judge had recently found persuasive.

These days, however, Judge Seeborg and his colleagues produce a rich seam of data that is being mined by a group of companies threatening to upturn the way the legal profession operates.

Just like a professional baseball or tennis player, Judge Seeborg, who hears a full range of criminal and civil cases, has his personal statistics that are now being rigorously collected and scrutinised.

Anyone hoping to bring a class-action lawsuit should know, for instance, that he has been presented with such cases on 37 occasions, allowing 51 per cent of them to proceed in full. By comparing him with the 670 other US district judges, lawyers can see where he ranks on granting such cases, how long they take to complete, how likely he is to make a summary judgment before trial or whether lawyers should expect to be forced to plead the case to a jury.

Under the common law system in the US, Britain and several other countries, the validity of legal arguments depends heavily on precedent.

So, a Californian lawyer might like to know, for instance, that Judge Seeborg's favourite US Supreme Court decision is Ashcroft v Iqbal, a 2009 case concerning the responsibility of a senior official for the actions of a subordinate, which he has cited on 423 occasions. He also likes Balistreri v Pacifica Police Dept, a 1990 appeals court decision stemming from a domestic violence case, which he has mentioned 312 times.

In Philip K. Dick's short story Minority Report, a trio of "precogs" plugged into a machine are used to foretell all crimes so potential felons can be arrested before they are able to strike. In real life, a growing number of legal experts and computer scientists are developing tools they believe will give lawyers an edge in lawsuits and trials.

Having made an impact in patent cases, these legal analytics companies are now expanding into a broad range of areas of commercial law.

"This is not about replacing judges," says Mr Daniel Lewis, co-founder of Ravel Law, a San Francisco lawtech company that built the database of judicial behaviour. "It is about showing how they make decisions, what they find persuasive and the patterns of how they rule."

Judge Seeborg is aware he is being monitored by Ravel but declined to comment for this article.

Mr Lewis says the capabilities of legal analytics are rapidly evolving. "A lot of lawyers think of their case as a special snowflake – that the facts are unique, that nothing like it has ever happened before. And it's just not true."

DATA TROLLS AND IP LITIGATION

The tech revolution has not only seen an explosion in innovation, it has also prompted a surge in legal disputes over intellectual property.

Some of these lawsuits were the result of competing claims among companies over who invented what first, but by the mid-2000s, a new breed of third-party entities had arrived – buying up patents and using the threat of litigation to extract a quick payment from their targets.

To some, they are "patent trolls", the shakedown artists of IP; to others, they hold businesses to account for plagiarising the work of genuine innovators. Either way, the amount of IP litigation ballooned, and there are now thousands of patent litigation cases in the US every year.

Until recently, a large portion of these cases were heard in the eastern district of Texas, which became the No. 1 venue for patent litigation, thanks to its speed in processing claims, the probability a case would proceed to trial, and the friendliness of its juries to patent holders suing for infringement – which, in turn, meant bigger payouts.

According to PwC figures, between 2013 and 2017, median damages in US patent claims were US$1.9 million (S$2.6 million) when judges made awards, but US$10.2 million when a jury did. Since claimants were able to "venue shop" for the most favourable court, they queued up to sue in Texas.

However, in May 2017, the Supreme Court, in effect, ended venue shopping for patent cases; instead, litigation would have to take place in the state where the defending business is based. Suddenly, it was vital to know the records of judges, lawyers and courts in jurisdictions such as Delaware, California – Judge Seeborg's domain – or New Jersey.

THE RISE OF LEX MACHINA

In an office above a nail bar in the Silicon Valley town of Menlo Park, the legal data business Lex Machina amasses as many rulings from US courts as it can get its hands on. Mr Josh Becker, the chairman, claims that three-quarters of the top 100 US law firms are Lex Machina clients.

"These days, everyone has analytics in baseball," he says, a reference to Moneyball, the book by Michael Lewis that inspired the sporting mania for using often obscure performance stats. "Soon, it will be the same with the law. And once everybody is doing that, it will be about how well you are using that data."

The idea behind Lex Machina – which, like Ravel, is now owned by data company LexisNexis – was to enable companies and their lawyers to assess their chances of winning a case as soon as the notice to sue arrives.

The sort of information that might be analysed includes how many times the opposing lawyer has filed certain types of lawsuit, in which court, with what success rate, who they have represented, and which attorneys they have faced. Once a judge has been assigned to the case, legal research companies can provide statistics on his record as well.

IP litigation was the spark for Lex Machina, which emerged as a Stanford Law School start-up. But once it had access to LexisNexis' broader database, it expanded into several other "high-volume" areas of the law, from employment and tax to product liability, medical negligence, insurance and bankruptcy. Other legal analytics companies followed a similar path.

To get ahead of the competition, US commercial lawyers set up alerts on Pacer, the electronic court records system, for when a new case has been filed against a company in their field. Once an alert pops up, says Dr Christian Mammen, a San Francisco partner at law firm Hogan Lovells, the in-house legal team of the affected business will start getting calls within minutes from lawyers offering to come to the company's defence.

"Three hours later, they'll be getting full pitches," says Dr Mammen, who has been litigating IP and tech cases since the dot.com boom in the late 1990s. That means offering advice on venue, strategy and personnel, backed up by the data. "You have to be ready with a compelling argument as to why you can handle their case best."

Proponents of legal analytics insist that it is only a matter of time before there will be massive data sets to cover wide areas of the law. They make a bold claim that this will lead to a better justice system. From showing which cases are a waste of time and money to pursue, to exposing which judges are mavericks and outliers, supporters say the insights from using data can improve the way that the legal system works.

As the potential use of these analytical tools spreads, more companies have emerged to meet demand. Among them is Premonition, based in New York, which shows the litigation history of judges, lawyers and law firms, including win/loss rates for trials that are benchmarked to competitors, the success rates of different types of motion in individual courts and a database of who sues and gets sued most often.

Bloomberg Law's Litigation Analytics and Los Angeles-based Gavelytics have similar functions, while Casetext and Judicata both offer deep-dive analysis of the legal documents most relevant to the case a lawyer is fighting, such as similar briefs filed by other firms, relevant case history and judges' citations, often down to the most cited paragraph.

Blue J Legal, a Toronto-based business, mines Canadian court rulings on tax and employment. After getting clients to answer questions on their individual circumstances, weighting each factor depending on the case in hand, its software produces a list of similar cases, relevant citations and a stark assessment in percentage terms of the client's chances of winning or losing.

MISSING DATA AND LEGAL HIVE MIND

The march towards data-driven justice has one big flaw, however: Most of the data is missing.

The vast majority of civil litigation, possibly 90 per cent, is dropped or settled out of court, which means the documents from the case are never made public. The reason is financial – "it is easy to start a lawsuit but expensive to continue it", says Dr Mammen.

Furthermore, while court documents are relatively easy to accumulate in the US, in other jurisdictions, including Britain, finding case law is much harder; the United Kingdom's main online database Bailii has improved public access over the past two decades but suffers from gaps in historical documents and struggles to keep up with new ones.

In legal areas where data is hard to come by, law firm Herbert Smith Freehills has created what it says is a "mini-hive mind" of real-life lawyers to assess a dispute. Called Decision Analysis, the project attributes risk weightings to each stage of a case – assessing if a business failed in its duties to a customer, for instance, and which factors might determine damages.

"In 'slips and crashes' tribunals, say, you have a rich pool of data points," says Mr Donny Surtani, a commercial disputes partner at HSF and former financial professional. "In commercial litigation, it is hard to find five similar cases, let alone 5,000. But clients are increasingly asking for probability-based terms (to express outcomes)... So this is trying to capture the legal team's judgment and help a client better understand the risks of litigation."

For all the hype about analytics, Dr Pablo Arredondo, a fellow at the Stanford Centre for Legal Informatics and co-founder of Casetext, says there are limits to what data can show.

"The judge analytics demonstrations I have seen to date oscillate between the blindingly obvious and the statistically irrelevant," he says. Knowing where to file a lawsuit or estimating how long a case will run for is undoubtedly important in developing your strategy, he adds, but some case histories – such as Ashcroft v Iqbal – are so commonly cited as to be useless in profiling an individual judge.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Yet, proponents of legal analytics insist that it is only a matter of time before there will be massive data sets to cover wide areas of the law.

They make a bold claim that this will lead to a better justice system. From showing which cases are a waste of time and money to pursue, to exposing which judges are mavericks and outliers, supporters say the insights from using data can improve the way that the legal system works.

"As we expand our data set, we hope the justice ministry and the relevant regulators will look at how justice is applied (across the country) and where the inconsistencies are," says Mr Edward Bird, chief revenue officer at Solomonic, a British company formed by a group of commercial lawyers and data scientists that aims to replicate some of the US analytics models.

"The top judges in the UK commercial courts are extremely consistent, but in lower-value cases (in courts around the country), you shouldn't be in a situation where you get a very different result depending on who you're in front of."

As with the malfunctioning pre-crime system in Minority Report, there are dangers with putting too much emphasis on what the data analytics suggest.

"The big challenge is, if eventually we do get to the point where the numbers do the predicting, do you start to short-circuit the process?" asks Mr Bird. "What does that do to access to justice for a claimant who is told, 'your chances are no more than this number and you won't get your day in court'? That's a big ethical question." FINANCIAL TIMES

Eugene the Instagram egg was always doomed

Molly Roberts

Nothing gold can stay. Especially not on the Internet. The story of the Instagram egg that set out to surpass Kylie Jenner's record for most-liked Instagram photo late last month proves the poet Robert Frost's warning.

The ovular sensation's organic beginnings prompted users to celebrate it as a symbol of purity; Jenner represented the cult of celebrity and influence-mongering that permeates social media sites, while the egg represented, well, an egg.

The simplicity was the thing. And then, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

A Hulu-sponsored ad aired during the Super Bowl revealed that the campaign had been orchestrated by some guy in London who works in advertising. But don't worry, all the attention will now, somehow, go towards promoting mental health. Also, related paraphernalia is up for purchase.

It's a tragic end to what started as an uplifting tale.

Maybe that was inevitable. The egg, to those who found it most inspiring, was an intervention into the Internet hierarchy. This was the populist revolt that the most radical of millennials had been waiting for: Everyday Instagram users would crown their own ruler instead of letting big money and big fame carry the Kylie Jenners of the world to the top.

Even more radically, the egg campaign challenged the idea that "likes" meant anything in the first place.

The Instagram egg campaign challenged the idea that "likes" meant anything in the first place, says the writer. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/WORLD_RECORD_EGG

Jenner's most-liked title was so empty and unearned that a totally neutral image – an item so quotidian it was impossible even to attach an agenda to – could snatch it away from her.

But the promise of this revolution was always hard to trust.

Instagram influencer culture revolves around celebrities (or pseudo-celebrities) presenting "real lives" that aren't real at all.

Instead, they are carefully curated to sucker viewers into buying stuff. Even corporate accounts feel the need to perform humanness: Wendy's dishes out sass to consumers who dis their burgers. Denny's cooks up tweets with the affect of a stereotypical stoner. MoonPie is filled with existential angst. Posters on all platforms lean into genuineness so heavily that everything has begun to feel fake.

The egg's initial appeal was that it was totally untouched by the penumbra of self-promotion darkening the whole Web.

But it existed in an atmosphere of widespread fauxthenticity, so warier users weren't wrong to wonder what was beneath its shell.

In the same way, though the egg's suddenly announced cause celebre is tough to argue with, it's also tough not to see the activism as cover for an attention-seeking ploy.

The egg, which, by the way, has apparently been named Eugene, was never going to be able to transcend these suspicions.

The very premise of its rise made that impossible: Organisers wanted to prove that likes were as absurd a metric as the idea of catapulting an egg into the global spotlight.

But the way they attempted to prove that point was to... get a whole tonne of likes.

And the shares that helped lead to those likes had to come from, you guessed it, influencers. Even Jenner herself responded to the egg on her Instagram.

In challenging the system, the egg lent it even more legitimacy. And now its creators, whatever their initial motivations, have chosen to celebrate their victory by revealing themselves as masterminds and leveraging the attention they have earned for more attention still, plus some cash.

Sure, they are directing at least some of the money to a positive cause – but Instagram influencers support charity, too.

"Eugene is global, Eugene is really global all over the world," one of the egg campaign's creators rhapsodised to The New York Times. Kylie Jenner is, too. WASHINGTON POST

BIG PICTURE

WEATHER
Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 34 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 24 to 50 (Good)

PHOTO: XINHUA

Chinese New Year cliffhanger

Tourists in China took the Spring Festival celebrations to new heights on Wednesday by scaling the rock face at the Feilada Rock Climbing Base of Jigong Mountain.

The mountain is located in Huaping township of Jianshi county, in the Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture of central China's Hubei province.

There are three rock-climbing routes spanning 650m, 850m and 900m. These attract rock-climbing enthusiasts not only during the festive season, but also year round.

B

HOME

1,560

NUMBER OF HDB RESALE FLATS SOLD LAST MONTH, 8.8% MORE THAN IN DECEMBER, 43% MORE YEAR ON YEAR **B2**

More than 100 bid farewell to Ben Goi

Son of billionaire Popiah King a man without airs and showed love through actions, says friend

Mr Ben Goi's wife, Ms Tracy Lee, holding a picture of him just before the funeral service at Mandai Crematorium yesterday.

Rei Kurohi and Jan Lee

The late businessman Ben Goi made it a point to remember the birthdays of all his friends, sending them greetings by text messaging even when he was travelling.

Once, he even got a friend a birthday cake for a surprise party when he realised it was missing one, said Mr Christopher Sin, 47, sharing anecdotes about his friend of 25 years.

Mr Sin, a manager in the semiconductor industry, described Mr Goi as a man without airs despite being the son of a Singapore billionaire.

"We are from different backgrounds but he doesn't care where you're from. If he calls you a friend, you're his equal," said Mr Sin, adding that Mr Goi would affectionately call him *dai lo*, or big brother in Cantonese. "He was someone who showed his love through his actions. Whatever kindness you showed him, he would repay you 10 times."

Mr Sin was among over 100 family members and friends who paid their last respects yesterday morning to Mr Goi, the youngest of Popiah King Sam Goi's four children. The family declined to be interviewed.

Mr Ben Goi was chief operating officer of Tee Yih Jia, a food manu-

PAYING RESPECTS continued on B2

Mr Ben Goi's hearse leaving for Mandai Crematorium yesterday. His father, Mr Sam Goi, said in his eulogy at Mandai: "I hope my youngest son can have a happy life in heaven as he did in life. I must thank everyone for coming to my place and sending him off. I'm glad so many people will think of him. He must feel very happy on his way to heaven." ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Although resale prices inched up by 0.5 per cent from December, compared with January last year, they were 1.1 per cent lower, and 13.9 per cent down from the peak in April 2013. ST FILE PHOTO

HDB resales up for first time after cooling measures

8.8% more flats resold last month compared with Dec; may signal sellers' acceptance of tighter property rules

Rachel Au-Yong
Housing Correspondent

More Housing Board flats changed hands last month compared with December, the first increase in HDB resale transactions since last July's cooling measures.

In all, 1,560 flats were resold last month, 8.8 per cent more than in December, according to flash estimates from real estate portal SRX yesterday.

It was also 43 per cent more than the 1,091 units sold in January last year.

Resale prices inched up by 0.5 per cent from December. But compared with January last year, they were 1.1 per cent lower, and 13.9 per cent down from the peak in April 2013.

While December to February can be sluggish months for the property market because of the festive season, OrangeTee & Tie research head Christine Sun said last month's figures might be due to "some sellers coming to terms with the cooling measures".

The property market cooling measures introduced in July last year included tightened loan limits.

Said Ms Sun: "Many sellers had been holding on to their flats in the hope that prices might increase, or they were unsure how the cooling measures might turn out."

"Now that things are clearer, some are dropping their prices to a more attractive level. There is also still ongoing concern about the depreciating leases of older flats."

But ZACD Group executive director Nicholas Mak said he would not read too much into the data as overall, the resale price index is still within expectation.

Flat prices should either flatline or decline by around negative 1 per cent for the whole year, he added.

SRX data also showed that the premium that buyers were prepared to pay over market value had increased last month compared with December.

The overall median transaction over X-value (TOX) rose $1,000 to negative $1,000.

However, buyers were more prepared to fork out more in relation to the valuation for bigger flats.

The TOX for five-room and executive flats were $1,000 and $4,000 respectively, but the TOX for three-room and four-room flats were negative $4,000 and negative $1,600.

The estate in which buyers paid the highest median TOX of $8,000 was Pasir Ris, followed by Woodlands with $4,000.

The mature estates of Clementi and Toa Payoh posted the lowest median TOX with negative $8,500. Serangoon was the next lowest at negative $7,000.

rachelay@sph.com.sg

43%

Increase in number of HDB resale flats sold last month, compared with a year ago.

25 drivers lured by online ads to smuggle cigarettes

Timothy Goh

Last year, 25 people answering online advertisements for drivers to go across the border were caught for smuggling duty-unpaid cigarettes from Malaysia.

The advertisements, which were posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and WeChat, offered payments ranging from $100 to $600 for every smuggling trip made into Singapore.

A typical ad might say it was looking for drivers who went to Johor Baru often to fill their cars up with petrol, and might even offer cars for those without one.

Answering such an ad on Facebook was 45-year-old Singaporean Law Hwa Peng, who was offered $400 for every cigarette-smuggling trip he made.

He was provided with a car, which he drove to Malaysia, but was arrested at Woodlands Checkpoint when he tried to drive back to Singapore on Nov 16 last year.

A total of 144 cartons and 1,143 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found inside modified compartments in the vehicle. The duty and goods and services tax (GST) evaded amounted to about $22,050 and $1,610, respectively.

Law was jailed for 20 weeks.

Another driver who answered an ad, Malaysian Ku Kai Chien, 25, was arrested at Tuas Checkpoint on March 21 last year, with 201 cartons and 790 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes in his van.

The duty and GST evaded amounted to about $23,910 and $1,750, respectively, and Ku was sentenced to six months in jail.

The other 23 drivers were given jail terms of between 10 weeks and six months, and had their vehicles seized by the authorities.

Singapore Customs assistant director-general of intelligence and investigation Yeo Sew Meng said: "Drivers who are hoping to make easy and quick money from the syndicates by smuggling duty-unpaid cigarettes into Singapore should think twice. They will end up paying a higher price when they are caught."

A Facebook advertisement recruiting drivers to smuggle duty-unpaid cigarettes from Malaysia into Singapore. PHOTO: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS

In response to queries, a Singapore Customs spokesman said the advertisements are usually put up on social media platforms by unknown, overseas accounts.

Those caught buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty and GST evaded, jailed for up to six years, or both.

Vehicles used in the commission of such offences may also be confiscated.

Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of customs duty or GST can call the Singapore Customs hotline on 1800-2330-000, e-mail customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg or use the Customs@SG mobile app to report these illegal activities.

timgoh@sph.com.sg

Mr Ben Goi's parents, Sam and Jacqueline Goi (both centre, in black), and wife, Ms Tracy Lee (embracing Mrs Goi), at the funeral service in Mandai Crematorium yesterday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Ministers and actors among those who paid respects

FROM B1

facturing business which his father expanded from a manufacturer of popiah (spring roll) skin into a global Asian food company. He was 43 when he died of a stroke in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Sunday.

His casket left for Mandai Crematorium at about 9.30am yesterday. Mourners could be seen sobbing as they accompanied the cortege out of the family's Bukit Timah home.

In his eulogy at Mandai, Mr Sam Goi said in Mandarin: "I hope my youngest son can have a happy life in heaven as he did in life. I must thank everyone for coming to my place and sending him off. I'm glad so many people will think of him. He must feel very happy on his way to heaven."

He also thanked everyone who paid their respects over the Chinese New Year period, including politicians. Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan was among those seen speaking with Mr Sam Goi at the family home yesterday. On Monday, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, Environment and Water Resources Minister Masagos Zulkifli and Manpower Minister Josephine Teo, as well as former foreign minister George Yeo, were seen at the wake.

Mr Sam Goi, who is also executive chairman of listed developer GSH Corp, was on several government committees and active in grassroots work. He recently stepped down as chairman of the Ulu Pandan Citizens Consultative Committee. He was No. 14 on Forbes' Singapore's 50 Richest list last year, with an estimated fortune of US$1.8 billion (S$2.4 billion).

Singapore actors including Terence Cao, Chew Chor Meng and Zhu Houren were spotted at the wake.

Mr Ben Goi's wife is Malaysia-born former TV actress Tracy Lee, who gave birth to their first child, a son, in February last year.

His sister, Ms Laureen Goi, the second of Mr Sam Goi's four children, told Shin Min Daily News on Tuesday that her brother was in KL to visit his wife's family for Chinese New Year. He was there with his wife, son and maid.

Last Saturday night, he suffered an intense headache and asked his wife to call an ambulance. Doctors at the hospital tried to save him but he died at 4am on Sunday. The family had been due to return to Singapore on Sunday afternoon.

Yesterday, Ms Goi choked up while delivering her eulogy. Referring to Ms Lee, she said: "Mei Leng, you are part of the family. We will take care of you even when Ben is not around. Papa and Mama, he will want us to be happy. Let this go, and have strength going forward."

Ms Lee sobbed after placing flowers on her husband's casket. She later turned away from the crowd to compose herself. During the cremation service, she was heard crying out in Mandarin: "Goodbye, hubby, goodbye. I will take care of your parents. Let's meet again in heaven."

rei@sph.com.sg
janlee@sph.com.sg

• Additional reporting by Timothy Goh

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Prosperity Yu Sheng
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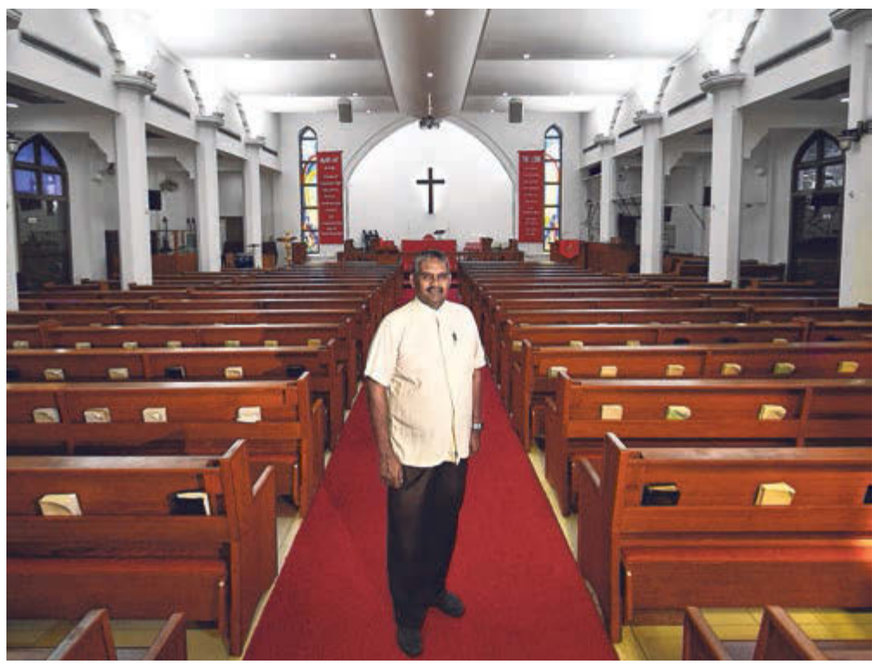

Above: Christ Church has been a landmark at the junction of Keng Lee and Dorset roads since it was built in 1941.

Left: Vicar Steven Asirvatham said the community made sacrifices to make sure the church was built. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI

Tamil Christians rallied to repair Christ Church when bombs hit it in 1942

Cheryl Teh

Situated at the intersection of Keng Lee and Dorset roads, the Parish of Christ Church has been a permanent fixture since 1941.

Since then, its surroundings have been swept up in a whirlpool of change. In 1997, the KK Women's and Children's Hospital moved to its current site just across the road from the church.

The rest of the area has been urbanised, with houses and neat well-kept grass verges bordering the roads – named after English counties, cities and towns such as Dorset, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham and Oxford.

A short, five-minute drive away from the church, the city bursts into life – Newton a little ways to the west, and the towers of Suntec City and downtown Singapore to its east.

The church building, with its white-and-beige facade and Gothic spires, is hard to miss as one travels down Keng Lee Road.

The history of the church begins with the Christians among the Tamil community who settled in Singapore.

In the 1930s, this growing congregation of Anglican Tamils secured a site in Dorset Road to build Singapore's first vernacular church. which would come to be known as Christ Church.

The foundation stone was laid on St Luke's Day, Oct 18, 1940, by Reverend B.C. Roberts, the Bishop of Singapore and Malaya.

Funds from the community poured in, and the church was built despite the war clouds gathering in the distance.

The main building took the form of modest parish churches of that period. But the building was constructed, like other pioneer "modern" church buildings of the inter-war period, using reinforced concrete – a material still used today.

The facade reflects the church's South Asian identity and heritage, as well as its architectural uniqueness.

This was intended by the designer, Priest Canon C.D. Gnanamani, who wanted to represent and combine Asian elements with traditional Gothic designs.

Combining the Gothic Revival and Neo-Classical styles favoured in Victorian Britain, some features of Christ Church that reflect Singapore's rich, multicultural history still stand today.

The church's half-dome, a feature not commonly seen in English churches, remains. Ogee, or "onion", arches line the sides and rear of the building, with the windows and doors also in the shape of these arches.

The church's first service was held on Palm Sunday, on April 6, 1941, but less than a year later, World War II reached Singapore.

During the Battle of Bukit Timah on Feb 11, 1942, the church was shelled by artillery and that bombardment continued for three days.

The area around it was largely destroyed, and the church was not only badly damaged but also looted. Its roof, pews and kneelers, as well as a half of its walls, were destroyed. But, despite the harsh conditions in wartime, the congregation contributed whatever they could and within three months, the damaged roof was repaired.

In the years after the war, the faithful realised their dreams of starting a Tamil school. The church was also granted parish status in 1958 by the Anglican Diocese of Singapore – the first church of the Indian community to get this honour.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority proposed the conservation of the building on Dec 28 last year, and church leaders welcomed the decision, pointing to the sacrifices that led to its construction.

"It was a challenge, and back in the day, resources and funds were limited, and to put up a building like this, it was a show of faith – people gave, sacrificially," said Reverend Canon Steven Asirvatham, the current vicar of Christ Church.

He added that the church and its history were part of many people's faith journey and the stories would pass down to the next generation.

The church celebrated its 78th anniversary last year, and remains today a spiritual home for the Tamil Christian community – with six services on Sunday in English, Tamil, Punjabi and Malayalam.

It is not only a physical monument and link to the history of Tamil Anglicans, but is also a familiar landmark in the neighbourhood.

tienli@sph.com.sg

Gojek driver in viral dispute video can drive for now

Tee Zhuo

The Gojek driver involved in an investigation into a dispute which was recorded on video that went viral on the Internet will be allowed to drive – for now.

Speaking to The Straits Times yesterday, Mr Kamaruzzaman Abdul Latiff said the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has allowed him to continue to drive for the ride-hailing firm until "the decision is out".

He also said his interview with LTA went well and he would just wait for the latter's decision.

The 49-year-old driver was interviewed yesterday by an LTA official in relation to a Jan 29 dispute with a 25-year-old female passenger.

On Jan 31, he shared a seven-minute clip on the Go-Jek Singapore Community Facebook page, showing a heated exchange with the passenger.

He said she was upset that he could not avoid the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) gantries during the journey.

Mr Kamaruzzaman said yesterday that he was asked during the interview what had happened before the recording, why he recorded the incident and posted the video online, and why he drove to the police station.

A spokesman for LTA said yesterday it has also requested to meet the passenger so that it can have a fuller picture of the incident.

ST reported earlier that LTA had sent a letter dated Feb 4 summoning Mr Kamaruzzaman to an interview yesterday as part of an investigation after complaints were filed against him.

LTA asked him to have his vocational licence and driving licence, as well as "the recording device, its recording and any other evidence". The letter also states that his attendance is compulsory under traffic rules.

A Gojek spokesman had said that the company is aware of the LTA investigations, with which it is cooperating "on an ongoing basis".

"It would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage," the spokesman added.

For now, neither Mr Kamaruzzaman nor the passenger, who wanted to be known only as Jovina, seems amenable to the idea of meeting to resolve the matter.

When asked yesterday if he would meet Ms Jovina, Mr Kamaruzzaman said he had "no answer" to the question.

"I am willing to forgive, but I don't think I can forget," he added.

When asked the same question, Ms Jovina said in an e-mail that "there was no misunderstanding to begin with to be cleared".

"I told the driver my destination and told him I do not wish to take the more expensive route.

"We did not come to an agreement in Bishan and I asked him to return me to pick-up point or drop me at any safe spot but he refused to drop me off while we were still in Bishan. The rides that I have taken have always not incurred ERP cost."

She added that one such route ran from Bishan to 1 Coleman Street, via Thomson and Bugis.

In the video, which was taken using Mr Kamaruzzaman's mobile phone, Ms Jovina is heard saying "it is clear that you are out to cheat (my) money".

Neither Gojek driver Kamaruzzaman Abdul Latiff nor Ms Jovina seems amenable to the idea of meeting to resolve the matter. PHOTO: KAMARUZZAMAN BIN ABDUL LATIFF/ FACEBOOK

Mr Kamaruzzaman repeatedly says that he prefers to settle any issues at a police station.

The car eventually comes to a stop in Lorong 4 Toa Payoh and Mr Kamaruzzaman is seen speaking to a Certis Cisco officer.

At one point in the video, the passenger screams, claiming that Mr Kamaruzzaman locked the car door on purpose and intended to kidnap her, noting later that he did not want to let her alight from the car when they could not settle their dispute.

teezhuo@sph.com.sg

Jail for man involved in two assault cases

Shaffiq Alkhatib

Ten months after attacking a taxi driver following a drinking session at Orchard Towers, Meera Moideen Sehu Mohamed was at it again.

After a night of drinking last year, the 33-year-old ganged up with three others to assault Mr Ahamed Bazeer, also 33.

Yesterday, Meera was sentenced to three months and four weeks' jail. The Singaporean had pleaded guilty last month to four charges in all. They are two counts of assault, one count of causing hurt by performing a rash act and one count of hurling vulgarities at a policeman.

The first incident happened after a night of merrymaking at Orchard Towers. Around 8.30am on May 24, 2017, Meera got into Mr Hoe Hwee Sin's taxi near the shopping centre and told the cabby to take him to Clementi.

About 10 minutes into the journey, Mr Hoe, 59, noticed that Meera was drooling inside the taxi and told him to stop it as it was "unhygienic", Deputy Public Prosecutor Zhou Yang told the court.

But Meera starting arguing with the cabby. At this point, Mr Hoe told him he could get out of the taxi if he was unhappy with the service provided. The cabby then stopped his vehicle in Paterson Hill near Grange Road.

Upset, Meera opened the left rear passenger door, but without checking for oncoming traffic. The door hit motorcyclist Marwan Ahmad, 39, who was unable to stop in time and fell onto the road.

Mr Hoe immediately alighted from his taxi to check on Mr Marwan.

He also used his mobile phone to snap photographs of the accident scene. When Meera saw this, he became aggressive and confronted the cabby. DPP Zhou said: "The accused used his own mobile phone and hit Hoe on the face with the phone. Thereafter, the accused kicked Hoe on the calf.

"Hoe reacted by pushing the accused away and managed to prevent the accused from attacking any further. As a result of the push, the accused fell onto the road."

Police arrived at the scene and arrested Meera, who also hurled vulgarities at Staff Sergeant Kong Zhi Qin, 28.

While out on bail for the first offence, an intoxicated Meera and three others assaulted Mr Ahamed near Orchard Towers. It happened around 9am on March 10 last year.

Court documents did not state the reason for the attack.

Yesterday, Meera was offered bail of $25,000 and ordered to surrender himself at the State Courts on Feb 28 to begin serving his sentence.

The cases involving his alleged accomplices – Valentonio Christopher, 25; Mohamed Naina Abdul Salam, 31; and Suresh Krishnamoorthy, 33 – are pending.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

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Tricky process to bring Brochez back to S'pore

Lawyers say American lover of doctor in HIV registry leak case not subject of arrest warrant nor facing OSA charges

Media reports of Mikhy Farrera Brochez's arrest in the US for criminal trespass have helped Singapore authorities locate him, but an arrest warrant is needed to bring him back to Singapore. PHOTO: MUGSHOTS.COM

Cara Wong
and Rei Kurohi

Media reports of American Mikhy Farrera Brochez's arrest in the United States for criminal trespass have cleared the first hurdle for the Singapore authorities – they now know his whereabouts.

But a tricky process lies ahead in seeking his return to Singapore to help in the probe on the HIV Registry data leak saga, said lawyers interviewed by The Straits Times.

The reason is Brochez is not the subject of an arrest warrant here nor facing charges under the Official Secrets Act (OSA), although the Ministry of Health said on Jan 28 that Brochez had disclosed the details of 14,200 HIV-positive individuals online.

This is unlike his Singaporean boyfriend, Ler Teck Siang, 37, a doctor who was charged under the OSA in June 2016 for failing to handle properly a thumbdrive containing data from the registry. Ler's trial for this charge is pending before the courts.

Ler, who was head of the ministry's National Public Health Unit, had access to the HIV Registry information for work purposes. Brochez, 34, who is HIV-positive, was found in May 2016 to be in possession of information that appeared to be from the registry.

While the authorities could try to get Brochez to return here through several methods, a more likely one is through the extradition treaty Singapore has with the US, should the charges he is accused of be suitable for it, said lawyer Anil Balchandani of IRB Law firm.

The authorities, however, would need to first make Brochez the subject of investigations or prosecution under new offences relating to the HIV Registry data leak, said other lawyers. They added that this process could involve issuing an arrest warrant against Brochez.

This move is necessary before Singapore can make an extradition request to the US, and such requests are usually accompanied by an arrest warrant, said veteran criminal lawyer Eugene Thuraisingam.

The crime Brochez is suspected of committing must fall within Singapore's list of 34 extraditable crimes to qualify for extradition. In addition, the crime must also be included in the extradition treaty between Singapore and the US, which lists 27 specific offences.

Arrest warrants, however, are not issued lightly. There has to be "at least enough evidence to show that there's reasonable suspicion that he's done it", said Mr Thuraisingam.

To gather enough evidence for an arrest warrant, the authorities may need to seek the help of counterparts in other countries, he added.

"If he had posted this information on websites, police could either get owners of websites to cooperate, or seek mutual legal assistance with the countries where the websites are based," said Mr Thuraisingam.

He noted that while Singapore usually has some networks of cooperation with other countries, Singapore police have no authority overseas without the consent of the respective countries.

The lawyers also said the crime Brochez is suspected of committing must fall within Singapore's list of 34 extraditable crimes to qualify for extradition.

Most of the crimes in the Extradition Act are felonies in the Penal Code, although since January last year, it includes offences "relating to the securing of computer material against unauthorised access or modification". The crime must also be included in the extradition treaty between Singapore and the US, which lists 27 specific offences.

A possible complication is that this treaty does not cover data leaks, said the lawyers. The reason: It originates from a treaty the US and Britain signed back in 1931 and it does not seem to have been updated since, said lawyers. Even if Brochez is accused of crimes that fall in both lists, the US authorities still have the final say, said Ascendant Legal's Mr Chew Kei-Jin.

Brochez, who is set to appear in a US court in Kentucky on Feb 18 for allegedly trying to trespass into his mother's house last December, may even contest the extradition order under the US law, and the matter would be handled by the US authorities.

"It seems the extradition route is extremely difficult," said Mr Chew.

But lawyers noted past instances of countries extraditing people wanted by the law even in the absence of an extradition treaty, or even if the existing treaty does not provide for the specified crime.

For example, in 2011, four Singaporeans were accused by the US courts of violating US trade sanctions by allowing radio frequency modules to be exported to Iran.

A US court said the parts were later found in explosive devices and asked for the extradition of all four Singaporeans.

Singapore's High Court agreed to the extradition of two of them as they had illegally exported controlled goods to Singapore – which is an offence here.

But the other two were cleared on grounds that their actions – of allowing the export of the radio frequency modules to Iran – were not offences here and did not fulfil the "dual criminality" condition under the extradition treaty. This requires an act to be an offence in both jurisdictions to be extraditable.

One of the two released was Lim Yong Nam, who was later arrested in Indonesia and extradited to the US although the US and Indonesia do not have a formal extradition treaty.

Lawyers also noted that should an extradition order fail to bring Brochez back to Singapore to face charges eventually, the authorities may still charge Brochez "in absentia".

carawong@sph.com.sg
rei@sph.com.sg

SEE OPINION A17

Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) chairman Paul Tambyah (left) posted a photo on Facebook of the gathering of opposition leaders (from second left) Dr Tan Cheng Bock, SDP chief Chee Soon Juan and Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh. Also present were People's Voice founder Lim Tean and People's Power Party chief Goh Meng Seng. PHOTO: PAUL TAMBYAH/FACEBOOK

Appearance of opposition leaders at Tan Cheng Bock's house creates buzz

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

The appearance of opposition party leaders at Dr Tan Cheng Bock's house on the second day of Chinese New Year has renewed discussion on whether they would team up and cooperate more closely at the polls in the future.

Among the politicians at the gathering at Dr Tan's home in Holland Grove Drive on Wednesday were Workers' Party (WP) chief Pritam Singh, Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) chief Chee Soon Juan and chairman Paul Tambyah, People's Voice founder Lim Tean and People's Power Party (PPP) chief Goh Meng Seng.

Several posted photos of their time there on Facebook, including Dr Tan, a former People's Action Party MP who said last month he had applied to register a new political party – Progress Singapore Party.

One photograph that caught the eye of observers was Dr Tan posing with SDP's Dr Chee and Dr Tambyah, and WP's Mr Singh, which was posted on Dr Tambyah's Facebook page.

The picture, and the more visible presence of opposition leaders this year compared to the past two years, was noted by regulars like PPP's Mr Goh. He said: "The most significant (thing) is the WP being willing to take a photo with the SDP... Maybe Mr Singh has a different leadership style, after all, walking out of Mr Low's shadow. It may be good for opposition unity."

Mr Singh took over as WP secretary-general last April from Mr Low Thia Khiang.

Under Mr Low's leadership, WP had been known to be hesitant in affiliating itself with other opposition parties, said Dr Felix Tan, associate lecturer at SIM Global Education.

Observers interviewed said they did not think the gathering was an indication that the opposition parties had forged new ground towards forming an alliance.

Last July, seven parties met to discuss the possibility of forming a coalition led by Dr Tan Cheng Bock.

WP did not attend.

Mr Goh noted that when the opposition parties met before the 2015 General Election to discuss how to avoid three-cornered fights, the WP had "refused to take group photos with other opposition parties".

The WP attended the first meeting but was absent at the second one, as it had reportedly made its intentions clear on which constituencies it would contest in and saw no need to attend.

Dr Felix Tan said pundits should not read too much into the WP's presence at Wednesday's gathering. At election time, the WP may still stick to its position of going it alone, he added.

Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser of the National University of Singapore said the Chinese New Year gathering of key party leaders gives the image of opposition unity. "But it is still early days for us to determine whether this show of opposition unity would go beyond form to real substance," he added.

WORKING TOGETHER

We discussed the future of Singapore. We are generally in agreement that... fundamentally, Singapore needs some changes and more transparency and accountability... This is a social occasion. We (the opposition parties) will definitely work together. It's the nature and shape that will take some time to decide.

DR PAUL TAMBYAH, chairman of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP)

Political observer Derek da Cunha had a different view. He said: "One can theorise that Mr Singh's visit to Dr Tan's residence might not solely have to do with Dr Tan, but rather, Mr Lee Hsien Yang."

Dr da Cunha said the political dynamics have changed somewhat, with Mr Lee endorsing Dr Tan and his proposed party, as well as his falling out with his elder brother, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

It would be a "game-changer" if the younger Mr Lee stood with Dr Tan as a candidate in the next election, as he would "hive off" a proportion of votes from the People's Action Party.

"I am not suggesting that it would be a winning formula, but it would certainly have some lustre with a segment of voters who are disgruntled with the Government and are looking for palatable reasons to vote against it," said Dr da Cunha.

"WP and its leader, Pritam Singh, seem to be hedging their bets by having some contact with Dr Tan. It's too premature to say how far that will go," he added.

Dr Tambyah, like some of the politicians, said it was mainly a festive gathering. "We will definitely work together. It's the nature and shape that will take some time to decide," he added.

adrianl@sph.com.sg

Benjamin Pwee leaves DPP to join 'bigger' party

Rachel Au-Yong
Political Correspondent

Mr Benjamin Pwee, who was secretary-general of the Democratic Progressive Party, declined to name the other party he is joining, saying he would leave it to its leaders to announce his membership.

Mr Benjamin Pwee has left the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to "join a bigger, more effective one" – and hopes other opposition members will do the same.

Mr Pwee, 51, who was secretary-general of the DPP, declined to name the other party, saying he would leave it to that party's leaders to announce his membership.

But he added that he would not be returning to the Singapore People's Party (SPP), under whose banner he contested the general elections in 2011 and 2015.

Said the business consultant: "The opposition scene is a big 'pasar malam' of small political parties, ineffective in resources, effort and size. I am taking the lead to step out of a small political party to join a bigger, more effective one."

He said it was urgent that other opposition members also "consolidate behind a few key established credible leaders" so that at least one-third of the House will have opposition representation.

"This will never happen with a fragmented opposition based on personality-led politics," he said.

The next general election must be held by April 2021.

Mr Pwee said his party switch was not a "knee-jerk reaction" and that he had been in discussion with the leader of the bigger party thrice over the past four months.

The Straits Times understands that around five other DPP members will be quitting to join the same party.

The DPP was one of seven opposition parties that discussed forming a coalition to be led by former People's Action Party (PAP) MP Tan Cheng Bock last July. Last month, Dr Tan announced that he had applied to register the Progress Singapore Party with 11 other "like-minded" members, though he did not say who they were.

Mr Pwee was part of the SPP until he took the helm at the DPP in 2013. In 2015, he and then chairman Hamim Aliyas quit the DPP to contest Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC under the SPP banner. They went on to resume their posts at the DPP after the polls.

Mr Hamim is now secretary-general of the DPP. Mr Ting Tze Jiang replaces him as chairman.

Mr Pwee had previously been chairman of the youth wing of the PAP in the Thomson area.

rachelay@sph.com.sg

Vistara pilots to fly for SIA, Scoot

Indian airline staff will help S'pore carriers meet manpower needs

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

Up to 24 pilots from Indian carrier Vistara will fly with Singapore Airlines (SIA) and its budget arm, Scoot, for about a year, joining the airlines progressively from last month.

The arrangement will help the Singapore carriers meet their manpower needs in the near term and provide Vistara pilots with experience in long-haul flights.

Vistara is 49 per cent owned by SIA and the rest by Indian conglomerate Tata.

The airline, which started domestic flights in January 2015, had planned to launch international operations last year. But the foray has been delayed due to regulatory issues. The airline should get the approval it needs sometime this month, said Mr Kapil Kaul, head of the Centre for Aviation in India. It would take a few months after that for international flights to begin, he added.

In the meantime, SIA and Scoot will take in up to 12 Vistara pilots each. The Indian airline would not say how many pilots it currently has.

A Scoot spokesman said the Vistara pilots "will supplement Scoot's needs as our fleet expands and reduce numbers needed from external recruitment in the near term". She added: "They are expected to be with Scoot for a period of not more than 12 months before returning to Vistara."

SIA said the Indian pilots coming here have undergone the airline's assessment.

Responding to concerns among some SIA pilots that their flying hours and, as a result, flying allowances, would be reduced with the entry of the Vistara pilots, SIA's spokesman said: "There will be no expected loss of flying hours... as the fleet is expanding."

The investment in Vistara is a key part of SIA's strategy to gain a foothold in the fast-growing Indian air travel market. Since March 14, 2017, SIA and its regional arm SilkAir have been code-sharing on flights operated by Vistara. SIA and SilkAir customers can easily book a flight from Singapore to an Indian destination, where they connect to a Vistara flight.

Members of SIA's and Vistara's frequent-flier programmes – KrisFlyer and Club Vistara – enjoy additional tier benefits as a result of the code-share partnership. The tie-up will allow SIA to connect customers to even more places in India and beyond when Vistara starts flying internationally, said the airline's spokesman.

The SIA group, comprising the main carrier, SilkAir and Scoot, currently flies 143 times weekly to 14 cities in India – Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, New Delhi, Chennai, Coimbatore, Kochi, Hyderabad, Trivandrum, Visakhapatnam, Amritsar, Lucknow and Tiruchirappalli.

Vistara operates flights to more than 20 Indian cities with about the same number of single-aisle planes, and plans to add about 60 new aircraft, including six Boeing 787-9.

While the Indian air travel market has been somewhat subdued in the last few years with annual growth rates of under 10 per cent, this year should see a return to double-digit growth, said Mr Kaul. And although competition continues to be tough, fares are holding up and airlines should end the year well, he added.

karam@sph.com.sg

Getai Night lights up River Hongbao

Fireworks lit up the sky above The Float @ Marina Bay yesterday at the end of Getai Night, one of the thematic nights of the River Hongbao 2019 bicentennial edition.

The audience at the event was also treated to a medley of songs performed by familiar faces from the getai scene such as Wang Lei and Lee Pei Fen, as well as Malaysian singer Zhang Xue Zhong, on the third night of the Chinese New Year.

Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, and Leader of the House, was guest of honour.

Taiwanese getai singer Hao Hao (left) was presented with a garland made up of $10 notes by a member of the audience after his performance.

Part of Singapore's Chinese New Year festivities since 1987, River Hongbao is organised by the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, Singapore Press Holdings, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Singapore Tourism Board and the People's Association.

River Hongbao 2019 at The Float @ Marina Bay is open from 2pm to 11pm daily till Sunday. Admission is free.

ST PHOTOS: TIMOTHY DAVID

MOE language teacher arrested in Bangkok over alleged child sex

Fabian Koh

A French-language teacher at the Ministry of Education (MOE) Language Centre in Singapore has been arrested in Bangkok for allegedly having sex with minors.

Jean-Christophe Quenot, 51, was arrested in a hotel room in the Thai capital on Monday, according to reports in the Thai media.

A check of the MOE Language Centre's website yesterday showed Quenot listed as a member of the French department, but his name was removed later in the day.

MOE told The Straits Times last night: "Jean-Christophe Quenot is a teacher in the French department at MOE Language Centre. We are doing internal checks, and note that this matter is being investigated by the Thai authorities.

"MOE takes a serious view of misconduct by our staff and will not hesitate to take disciplinary action against those who do not adhere to our standards of conduct and discipline. In serious cases, their service may be terminated."

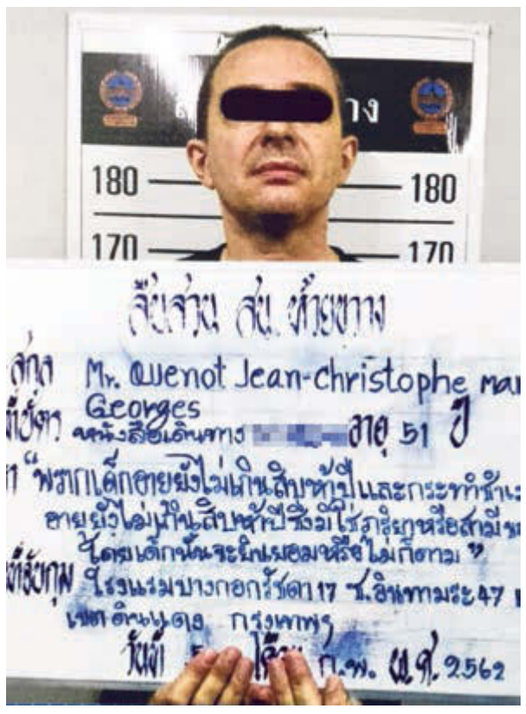
At a press conference on Wednesday, the commander of the Metropolitan Police, Major-General Senit Samrarnsamruajkit, alleged that Quenot would meet boys aged 13 to 15 at the Huay Kwang Stadium in Bangkok, and offer to teach them English and coach them in football. This started a year ago. He allegedly invited some boys to his hotel room for sex in exchange for cash.

When police arrested him on Monday, officers found a camera tripod in the hotel room and a video of Quenot having sex with a teenage boy, Thai reports said. They also found a computer with pornographic films.

One of Quenot's former students, Mr Aaron Pereira, told ST he recognised Quenot from his mugshot published in Thai media and was "completely shocked and in disbelief" over the arrest.

The 27-year-old, who works in the aviation sector, studied French as an A-level subject at MOE Language Centre's Bishan campus from 2008 to 2009.

The centre, which also has a campus in Newton, is where students study foreign languages such as French, German and Japanese.



Jean-Christophe Quenot, 51, was held for allegedly having sex with boys. PHOTO: THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

fabkoh@sph.com.sg

24 years' jail and cane for man who sexually abused stepdaughter

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

A 45-year-old driver who sexually abused his stepdaughter for more than six years, starting when she was 12, was sentenced to 24 years' jail and 24 strokes of the cane yesterday.

The High Court heard that the girl told her mother about the abuse in 2017 after the man broke his promise to stop sexually abusing her once she turned 18. They considered making a police report but decided not to do so.

The woman then told the girl to live with her biological father and to cut off contact with the man.

A few months later, for reasons not stated in court, the girl moved back and her stepfather resumed the abuse. This time, she and her mother reported the man, who was arrested the same day.

Yesterday, he pleaded guilty to three charges of aggravated sexual assault by penetration. Another 18 charges of various sexual offences were taken into consideration.

The parties are not named to protect the identity of the victim, who is now 20. Her parents divorced in 2000. In 2007, her mother married the accused and later had two daughters with him.

In 2010, the family moved to Johor Baru and the girl travelled to Singapore daily to attend school.

The man, who was diagnosed as a paedophile after his arrest, admitted that he started preying on the girl at their JB home in 2010.

Eventually he also started abusing her in Singapore. The abuse took place in the Woodlands flat of the accused's mother, where the girl would go after school to wait for him to take her home.

On one occasion in 2011, when he was supposed to take her to school, the man took her to the flat instead and made her perform oral sex on him.

In early 2012, the family moved back to Singapore. Several days later, while the girl's mother and siblings were asleep, the man forced her to perform oral sex on him in the toilet of their flat.

After his arrest in June 2017, the man told a psychiatrist that he had engaged in the sexual acts as he had an "increased sexual need".

Deputy Public Prosecutor Raja Mohan sought a 26-year jail term, pointing to the man's persistent acts against a minor who suffered in silence for six years.

Defence counsel Melvin Loh pleaded for leniency, noting that his client had pleaded guilty.

No action is being taken against the mother in this case for failing to report a crime.

selinal@sph.com.sg

THE STRAITS TIMES
A Singapore Press Holdings publication
News Centre
1000 Toa Payoh North, Singapore
318994

CONTACT US
General line: 6319-6319
Home: 6319-5397
stnewsdesk@sph.com.sg
Business: 6319-5360
stbusiness@sph.com.sg
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stdigital@sph.com.sg

FORUM

Cheetham's take

The Health Promotion Board tracks the health of 20,000 adults via smart watches, which record the number of steps taken. Here's how e-scooter riders can take part too:

Improve the grants scene in Singapore

The two cheating cases – a senior executive duping Spring Singapore and the SkillsFuture scam – sum up the dismal state of the grants landscape in Singapore (8 more charged in $40 million SkillsFuture fraud case, Jan 12; and Spring S'pore exec admits to duping agency of $155,000, Feb 1).

In rolling out a series of programmes and grants designed to help Singaporeans upskill and local businesses strengthen their capabilities, the Government has unfortunately bred grant officers who have never worked in the industry and therefore lack experience in evaluating whether there is true value-add as a result of the grant money spent.

This had also led to entrepreneurs whose key business strategy is to leverage government grants. For many of them, the outcomes do not need to be sustainable as the funding takes care of the costs.

As a result, despite the millions of dollars in grant money being dispensed over the years, our country's productivity and innovation needles have barely shifted, and Singapore companies continue to struggle internationally.

I propose the following:

- Hire professionals, managers and executives with industry experience to be grant officers.
- Ban former civil servants who were previously involved in grants from being consultants or helping Singaporeans and businesses apply for grants.
- Businesses need customers to build up their skills, knowledge and experience. The Government needs to take the lead in directing their ministries and government-linked companies to adopt local vendors and help them develop capabilities.

In short, the free flow of government grants should be reined in with greater emphasis placed on true value-add.

Liu Fook Thim

Set up COI to probe HIV data leak case

The recent news analysis by defence and security editor Kor Kian Beng highlights possible lapses and blunders on how the concerned officials in the Ministry of Health (MOH) handled the data leak of HIV-positive individuals from early 2012 and indicates a possible systemic failure in the procedures and processes in MOH (Answers to many questions needed to assuage public concerns; Jan 31).

How was Dr Ler Teck Siang working as a locum in November 2013, allowing him to abet in the false blood test, when he was apparently still employed by MOH?

A thorough investigation and root cause analysis is required to identify the causes and negligent parties that led to this embarrassing and illegal leak of personal and confidential data. The Government should appoint an independent Committee of Inquiry (COI) similar to the one appointed to look into the SingHealth data leak last year.

Like Mr Kor noted, it is imperative for the authorities to provide more answers to assuage public concerns. MOH badly needs to redeem the trust and confidence of the public.

Madusoodanan Janardanan Pillai

Better to ask if IB is suited to individuals

The discussion about whether Singapore should forgo A-level exams and choose the International Baccalaureate (IB) system instead is an interesting one.

But instead of asking if the IB is a better fit for Singapore students, it would be better to ask if it is suited to each individual student (Is IB a better fit for S'pore students?, by Mr Ivan Goh; Jan 31).

The IB adopts a more holistic and broad-based approach, where students are required to study three higher-level and three standard-level subjects, including two languages, mathematics, a science subject, a humanities subject and an arts subject.

Students are graded on continuous assessments, in the form of presentations and written assignments, which account for 20 per cent to 50 per cent of a subject's final grade.

Students are also required to write an individual research essay and engage in philosophical and critical thinking through the Theory of Knowledge subject.

The creativity, action and service requirements of IB also ensure that students engage in community service and provide opportunities for personal growth.

The A-level route, on the other hand, requires most students to take three H2 subjects and one H1 subject, or four H2 subjects, coupled with General Paper and Project Work.

The system is also based on the traditional final examinations accounting for the whole grade of each subject.

In terms of academic systems, the IB requires greater rigour than the A levels over a longer period of time. It is a myth that the IB is easier than the A levels.

With two different systems provided, students who prefer the model that requires and rewards continuous effort, and which provides more exposure, can choose the IB, while those who prefer the traditional "one-exam-decides-all" model, where continuous effort may not necessarily be required, can choose the A levels.

Ultimately, it is not about which system fits a group of people but, rather, which system tailors to the specific needs of individuals.

Mr Goh's letter also referred to a larger percentage of Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) students scoring distinctions compared with Raffles Institution students.

Perhaps, the question should also be about the quality of teachers available to the students and the quality of the students themselves too.

Alden Tan Ek Kai

FORUM ONLINE

1. SEAH YAM MENG: Red packets a token of appreciation.

2. TAN WHEE CHENG: Be sensible about hongbao giving at crematorium.

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ST wine
our best picks

Wines to go with CNY dishes

Here are ST Wine's top 10 picks and the food to pair them with

Deep Wood Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside 2016
Country: Australia
Usual price: $75
ST Wine price: $66
Food pairing: Braised noodle, bak kwa and nian gao

Salvalai Monile Ripasso Corvina 2014
Country: Italy
Usual price: $70
ST Wine price: $55
Food pairing: Pan-fried beef, barbecued red meats and dumplings

Isabel Estate Pinot Noir 2016
Country: New Zealand
Usual price: $75
ST Wine price: $66
Food pairing: Roasted duck and fish dishes

Koyle Royal Syrah 2009
Country: Chile
Usual price: $60
ST Wine price: $52
Food pairing: Roasted and grilled meat, curry

Tenuta Di Corte Giacobbe Suove 2017
Country: Italy
Usual price: $45
ST Wine price: $38
Food pairing: Lobster, grilled fish, abalone, smoked salmon lo hei and other seafood

Chateau La Mauleone, Lalande De Pomerol 2013
Country: France
Usual price: $50
ST Wine price: $43
Rating: RP 92 points
Food pairing: Buddha jumps over the wall, pen cai, braised and other stewed dishes

Montes Limited Cabernet Sauvignon Carmenere 2016
Country: Chile
Usual price: $43
ST Wine price: $39
Rating: JS 91points
Food pairing: Roasted meats, preserved meats

Kalleske Clarry's Grenache-shiraz-mataro 2017
Country: Australia
Usual price: $55
ST Wine price: $49
Food pairing: Peking duck and roasted suckling pig

Kaiken Terroir Series Torrontes 2016
Country: Argentina
Usual price: $39
ST Wine price: $33
Food pairing: Teochew–Cantonese style steamed fish, steamboat and chicken dishes

Koyle Auma 2013
Country: Chile
Usual price: $180
ST Wine price: $168
Rating: RP 93 Points
Food pairing: Roasted meats, roasted pork, bak kwa, lasagna, cold cuts

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Distribute wealth when HDB owners reap a windfall

The Government should make sure that housing policies do not exacerbate the social divide through the lottery effect (Million-dollar HDB flats: Location, type and size count; Feb 4).

In recent years, the focus has been to ensure upward mobility for all Singaporeans, as there is a bigger divide across socio-economic status which threatens our social fabric. However, housing policies exacerbate this divide as only a lucky few benefit from them by successfully balloting for a Build-To-Order Housing Board flat in a coveted location.

While these few stand to make a handsome profit from either selling or renting their flat after the minimum occupation period, those profits are ultimately being subsidised by taxpayers.

In such situations, I hope the Government will take measures to ensure better distribution of wealth, such as imposing a capital gains tax on the sale of subsidised flats with the tax decreasing incrementally with the owner-occupation period.

The funds collected could be channelled into helping the less fortunate.

Ultimately, HDB flats are heavily subsidised and meant for owner-occupation, and not to benefit a limited segment by giving them the windfall of a lifetime.

Lee Yong Se

Don't blame inequality when child can't read

Flogging socio-economic inequality as the underlying reason for all manner of social ills, including the inability of children from some low-income families to read, is feeble as there is ample evidence to show that with the right attitude and application, such disadvantages need not be permanent (Inequality can affect child's reading ability, by Mr Thaqif Ismail; Feb 2).

What is so obnoxious about Ms Lenny Rahman's suggestion that all parents should take a vested interest in their children's education, instead of merely outsourcing it to schools or enrichment classes?

Her tone may have been harsh, but she was speaking a well-intentioned truth out of sheer frustration at parental negligence.

Not once did she raise the sceptre of tuition to nurture good reading habits in children.

In fact, spending huge sums on tuition may just turn out to be counterproductive and wasteful.

It does not take a fortune for children to learn the basics of reading. Everyone has access to free reading material at the numerous libraries across our island.

All these children need is some proper nurturing from their parents at home, not more of the same old crutch-and-defeatist mentality.

Those who find it tough to juggle the demands of work with raising their children – and this applies to parents from different socio-economic backgrounds – may perhaps wish to heed Ms Rahman's advice to start a family only when they are emotionally, intellectually and financially more secure.

There is only so much that "systemic familial inequality" can do to one's fate if one has the innate intelligence, drive, savvy and adaptability to overcome one's adversities.

Inequality will affect children's ability to read only if their parents allow it.

Toh Cheng Seong

Education system's job to teach pupils the basics

I was flabbergasted when I read about Ms Lenny Rahman attributing a pupil's inability to read certain words to negligence on the part of his parents (Who should teach kids to read: Teachers or parents?; Jan 28).

Instead of probing further to understand his situation and giving the feedback to his English teacher, her instinctive reaction was to blame his parents for it.

Saying that parents should be responsible for helping children to read is similar to saying that individuals should be answerable for their own achievements in education and life. Both are neither helpful nor illuminating.

Where able and if circumstances allow for it, people will naturally aim to do better in life and help their children to do so.

We should, instead, ask ourselves whether our educational system today is doing enough to equip our pupils with fundamental skills, like reading.

We may be taking this for granted given the increasing levels of affluence and education of parents, who are able to read and send their children to phonics classes as early as at the age of two.

In a hypothetical situation where 90 per cent of the pupils at a certain level are able to fulfil the reading requirements, what are the standard operating procedures in place to help the 10 per cent?

In a bid to "teach less", have we inadvertently created a situation where the onus is now placed more heavily and unfairly on individuals to fill the knowledge gap?

What happens then to those who are depending on the system to help them cover sufficient ground to excel?

Following the incident, there have been discussions about the importance of parental involvement and suggestions on how parents can help.

But let's be clear – the school and public education system must serve as the key and primary means through which our pupils acquire basic skills, such as literacy.

Given the number of hours children spend in school, there is no comparable substitute.

While our education system has been lauded for its performance in global education rankings like Pisa, its success should also be measured by how well it serves those who have not been "enriched" through private classes and their parents' own resources.

Leonard Tan

Excerpts from readers' letters

S'POREANS' PART IN SUSTAINABILITY

The approach of turning waste into resources with economic value is inspiring and encourages businesses to think more creatively about how they handle waste management (Turn trash into treasure, says Masagos; Jan 26).

As Singapore's population grows, it is no longer only the Government's responsibility to take precautionary actions to increase the country's sustainability. Singaporeans, too, need to play their part by changing the way they consume, live and dispose.

The simple acts of one bringing his own grocery bag or recycling his waste can go a long way in the future.

Ethel Lee (Ms)

DO MORE TO PREVENT SMOKING IN CABS

While the Government is doing a lot to curb smoking in Singapore, many taxi drivers are still smoking inside the taxis that they drive.

In the last 24 hours alone, I boarded two taxis that smelled of cigarette smoke.

A few months ago, even though it was the peak hour and taxis were hard to come by, I stepped out of a taxi I had boarded with my young son due to the smell of smoke.

I hope the relevant authorities and taxi companies will impose stricter rules against taxi drivers who smoke in their taxis for the comfort and health of commuters and their families.

Lee Keng Yeow

BAN DIESEL-POWERED BLOWERS

The diesel-powered air blowers used to clear dead leaves cause not only noise pollution, but air pollution too.

I have observed that the use of such blowers has multiplied, and contractors do not seem to care about the health of the workers operating these devices, as they are often not wearing masks or ear mufflers.

Surely an easy solution would be to replace these with electric air blowers, which would cut both air and noise pollution.

Dilip Doshi

ArtSG will help Singapore bounce back

The jury is still out on Singapore's reputation as an Asian art hub after the last-minute cancellation of Art Stage Singapore (Art Stage fair cancelled days before opening; Jan 17).

Another international fair, ArtSG, will be staged in Singapore in November. This is the way forward to salvaging the Republic's reputation as an arts hub, if the organisers deliver using the Taipei Dangdai fair as a benchmark.

Singapore needs an international art fair, as all global cities have them to showcase and project their cultural power.

The next nine months are crucial for the planning and execution of ArtSG so that Singapore can bounce back from the smear the cancellation left on our international reputation as a cultural powerhouse and Asian and global arts centre.

Hua Tye Swee

WRITE IN: Letters should be meant for exclusive publication in The Straits Times. They should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone numbers. The Forum editor reserves the right to edit the letters. For women, please indicate Miss, Ms, Mrs or Madam. Please e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg. Readers can also respond to letters via Facebook and Twitter.

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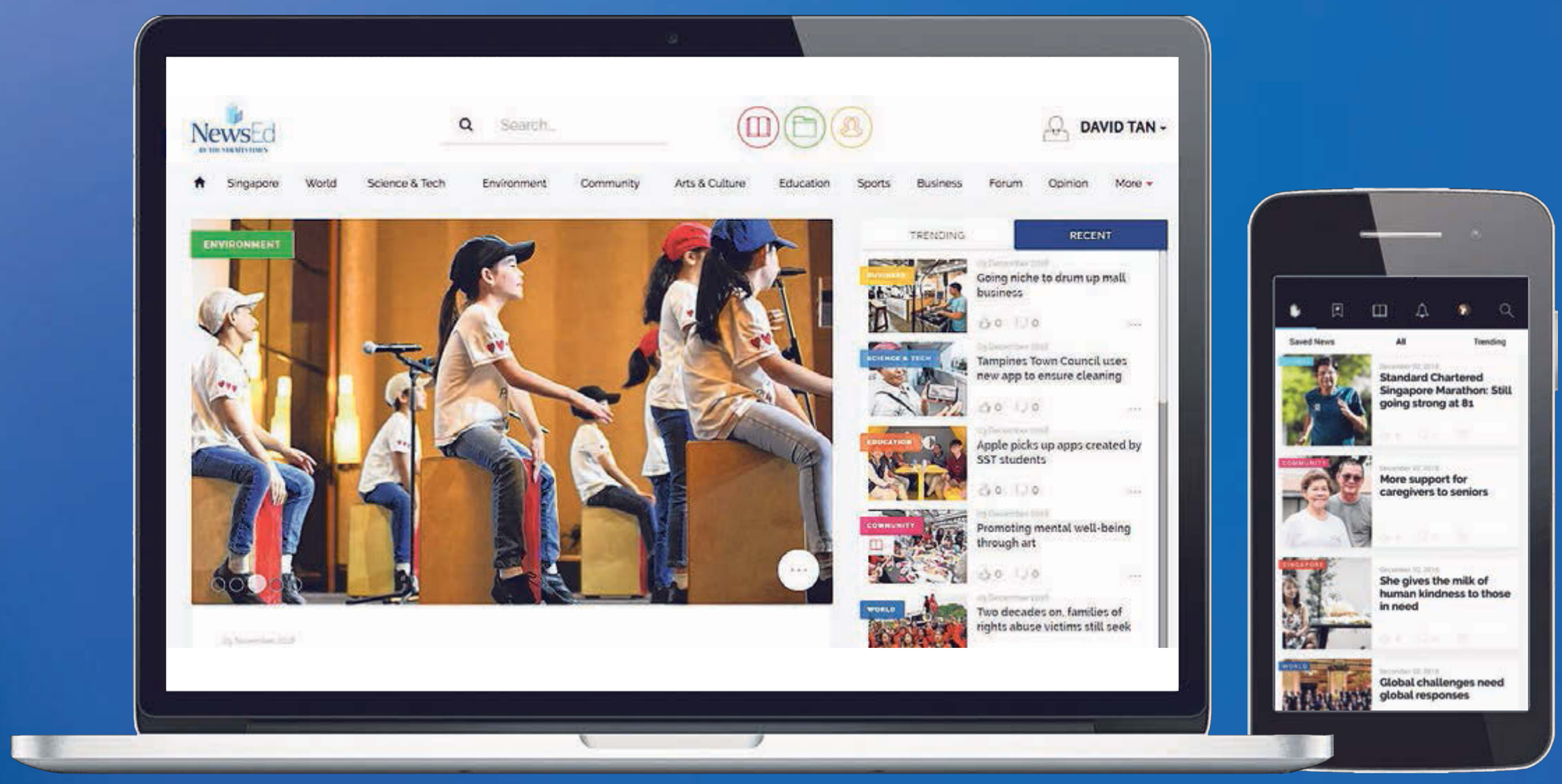

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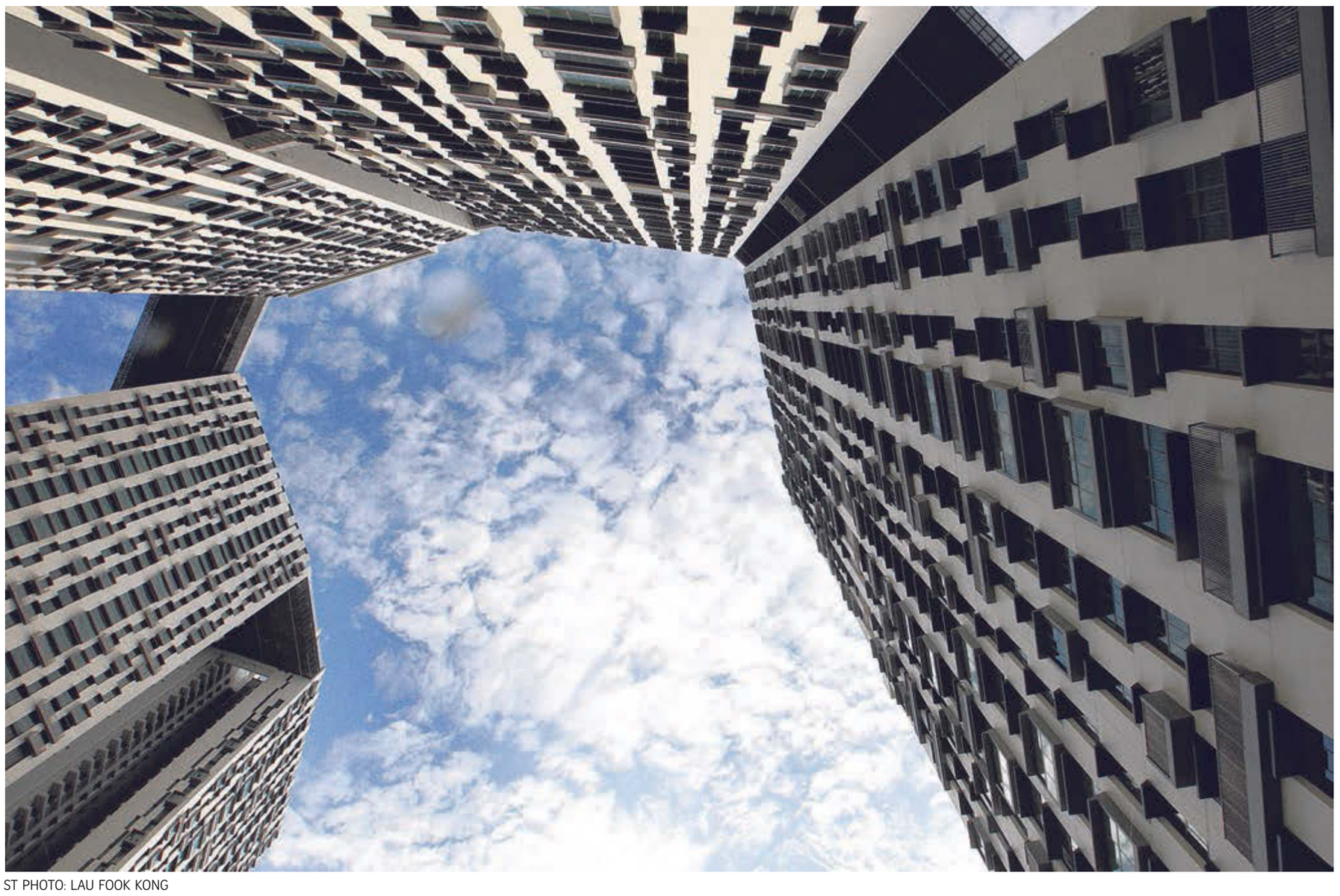

ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

Pinnacle of housing

The Pinnacle@Duxton, rising 50 storeys high, stands on a plot that was occupied by the first rental blocks in Tanjong Pagar constituency.

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The initiative launched in February this year focuses on producing exclusive stories, first-hand reporting and opinion pieces for subscribers.

BEST INNOVATION TO ENGAGE YOUTH AUDIENCE (BRONZE)

Game Of $urvival

The interactive game was part of ST's coverage of the Budget this year. It invites users to pick a character and navigate their financial decisions.

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BUSINESS

MARKUS BRAUN
WIRECARD'S CEO IN SPOTLIGHT AMID FRAUD ALLEGATIONS **C3**

SoftBank shares surge on news of $7.4b stock buyback

18% rise comes amid bid to close gap between company's perceived worth and market value

TOKYO • SoftBank Group shares jumped the most in a decade yesterday on plans to repurchase as much as 600 billion yen (S$7.4 billion) of stock, a shift in strategy for founder Masayoshi Son, who has long favoured spending his capital on technology investments.

He unveiled SoftBank's biggest-ever buyback as he tries to close the gap between what he thinks the group is worth and its market value.

It will be funded with proceeds from the 2.4 trillion yen initial public offering (IPO) of the company's telecommunications unit last December. The stock rose 18 per cent, the most since November 2008, reaching the daily limit to close at 9,962 yen.

"This latest buyback changes the equation and puts a floor under SoftBank stock," Jefferies Group analyst Atul Goyal wrote in a report.

Mr Son spent much of his post-earnings presentation on Wednesday explaining that SoftBank's holdings are worth 21 trillion yen net of debt, while the market value is 9 trillion yen.

The gap is even laid out on its website, which shows the stock trading at a 50 per cent discount to a sum-of-the-parts calculation that includes the telecoms unit, Alibaba Group Holding, US carrier Sprint Corp and Yahoo Japan Corp.

"What is that gap all about? Isn't that weird?" Mr Son said at the briefing. "I personally think the share price is too low."

SoftBank's 600 billion yen buyback added more than twice that amount to the value of its stock. Its market cap rose by about 1.9 trillion yen, to 11 trillion yen.

SoftBank has had success with buybacks in the past. In 2016, Mr Son announced that the Tokyo-based company would buy as much as 500 billion yen, which sent shares up by the limit the next day. The price doubled over the next year.

Of the total raised from the telecoms unit's IPO, 700 billion yen will go towards debt repayment, 700 billion yen for investments and 600 billion yen for the buyback, Mr Son said, without saying what the rest was for.

The listing of the domestic telco operations and the pending sale of Sprint were part of a plan to focus more on the US$100 billion (S$136 billion) Vision Fund. The company's portfolio includes the world's biggest ride-hailing company, Uber Technologies, and co-working giant WeWork.

Thanks to valuation gains, profits from SoftBank's Vision Fund and Delta Fund more than trebled to 176 billion yen.

"The share repurchase fits perfectly with the goal of boosting the company's valuation," said Shinkin Asset Management chief fund manager Naoki Fujiwara.

The Vision Fund sold all of its shares in US graphics chipmaker Nvidia Corp last month, worth 398 billion yen, SoftBank said.

News of the share sale first emerged last December, when people with knowledge of the matter said it was likely. For the three quarters preceding the sale, SoftBank booked a net loss of 50 billion yen on the stake.

The share repurchase period is from yesterday until the end of January next year, when the stock will be retired.

SoftBank's operating income rose 60 per cent to 438 billion yen in the last three months of last year. Revenue rose about 5 per cent.

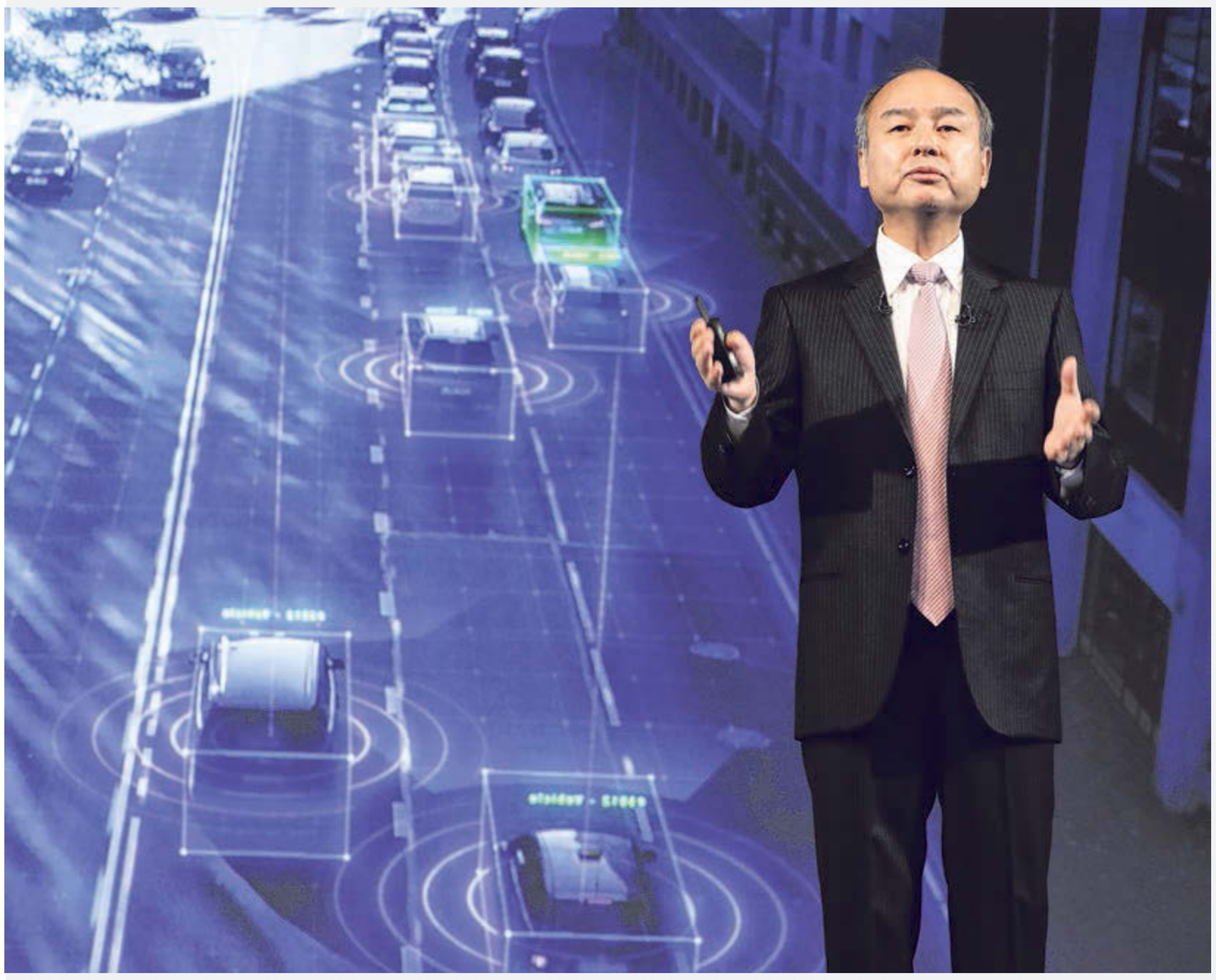
"The results were very good," said Mr Fujiwara. "The operating business is doing well, and the Vision Fund adds to that."

The telecoms unit yesterday reported a 24 per cent increase in profit during the quarter, despite a mobile service failure that hit millions of customers before its IPO last December. The company kept its outlook for net income to climb 4.8 per cent to 420 billion yen in the fiscal year ending next month.

It is also readying a new fund focused on Latin America that will be run by chief operating officer Marcelo Claure, people familiar with the matter said last week.

BLOOMBERG

Billionaire founder's bid to make the numbers add up



SoftBank Group Corp's founder Masayoshi Son speaking in Tokyo on Wednesday. Mr Son, who thinks SoftBank's share price is "too low", explained during his post-earnings presentation that day that the company's holdings are worth 21 trillion yen net of debt, yet the market value is 9 trillion yen. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Call it the Masayoshi Son mathematical distortion field.

The founder of SoftBank Group Corp added about 1.88 trillion yen (S$23.2 billion) to the market value of his company yesterday with a plan to buy back shares worth less than a third of that amount. Based on his own stake, Mr Son's net worth rose by about US$5 billion (S$6.8 billion).

The billionaire is no stranger to funny mathematics. On Wednesday, he opened his earnings presentation with a riddle: "25 – 4 = 9?"

The formula is the 25 trillion yen value of SoftBank's assets minus 4 trillion yen in debt, far from being equal to its market value of 9 trillion yen. It captured Mr Son's long-standing argument that SoftBank's share price does not reflect the value of its business and investments.

Here is what is at play.

1 HOW BIG IS THE BUYBACK?

It is the biggest ever for SoftBank. The company plans to buy back as much as 600 billion yen starting yesterday till the end of January next year, and the stock will be retired.

2 HOW IS HE PAYING FOR THIS?

With money from mom-and-pop investors in Japan. The buyback will be funded by the proceeds from the 2.4 trillion yen initial public offering (IPO) of the firm's telecommunications unit last December, which was marketed to individuals. While SoftBank Group's shares have gained 36 per cent this year, the telecoms unit is trading 12 per cent below its IPO price of 1,500 yen.

3 HOW MUCH IS SOFTBANK GROUP WORTH?

According to Mr Son, 21 trillion yen net of debt. That includes a 12.5 trillion yen stake in Alibaba Group Holding, a 2.4 trillion yen telecoms unit, 2.6 trillion yen US carrier Sprint Corp, 2.7 trillion yen each in the Vision Fund and chipmaker Arm Holdings, and 600 billion yen in Yahoo Japan Corp. SoftBank's market cap was closing in on 11 trillion yen yesterday.

SoftBank shares rose to a high of 9,955 yen yesterday, still a 50 per cent discount to Mr Son's sum-of-the-parts calculation that puts shareholder value at 20,055 yen a share.

4 WHAT COULD HELP CLOSE THE GAP?

Most of SoftBank's assets are in mature companies like Alibaba, Sprint and Yahoo Japan. That is why Mr Son has been focusing more on the US$100 billion Vision Fund and its portfolio of private companies that includes ride-hailing giant Uber Technologies.

Thanks to valuation gains, profits from the Vision Fund and SoftBank's own Delta Fund more than tripled to 176 billion yen in the quarter ended Dec 31. This year, investors could look forward to a windfall from the planned listings of Slack Technologies and Uber.

BLOOMBERG

Insurer taps AI to devise preventive healthcare solutions

Aw Cheng Wei

Insurer Prudential is teaming up with three technology companies to develop financial and healthcare solutions as it steps up its innovation drive.

The firm is working with artificial intelligence company Knowtions Research to devise tailored preventive healthcare programmes.

It is also building a digital platform with Ailleron so financial consultants can conduct virtual presentations, share documents and sign on customers electronically.

DataRobot will employ automated machine learning and augmented data science to help improve Prudential products and customers' buying experience, the insurer said last week.

Ms Kalai Natarajan, strategic engagements head at Prudential Singapore, told a briefing in London that the new solutions could be rolled out across its 12 life insurance markets in Asia, potentially reaching 15 million customers.

"Singapore is a key innovation test bed... because of the country's strong digital infrastructure and conducive business environment," she added.

The three solutions were chosen from 30 applicants which took part in last year's PRU Fintegrate, an annual initiative that started in 2017 to employ technology to improve its business.

Prudential said the trio stood out because of their understanding of customer needs, strong business and financial model and the maturity of their products, among other factors.

The insurer will invest in the winning companies' proofs-of-concept, run pilot projects and come up with implementation plans.

Prudential Singapore chief executive Wilf Blackburn said the latest tech solutions are being developed to "prevent and postpone the progression of chronic diseases" for its customers.

He added: "Our customers are living longer but not all of those extra years are necessarily spent in good health. This is why we want to work with tech partners to develop healthcare solutions."

Applicants for this year's PRU Fintegrate must have a proven track record in creating solutions that can be applied to a large market quickly. Other criteria include a valid product set, an existing client base and secured funding.

Singapore has become a key testing ground for the British-based insurance giant, which invested $70 million in technology here in 2017.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam urged insurers to tap technology and to go beyond paying for medical claims to preventive care when Prudential moved to its new office at Marina One in 2017.

awcw@sph.com.sg

Next Fed move could be rate cut if growth 'really weakens', says Yellen

WASHINGTON • Former Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen said the US central bank must rely on incoming economic data to determine if its next policy move will be up or down, while likening the current moment to 2016 when she kept interest rates on hold almost all year.

Former Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen says that the US economy is still "solid and strong".

"It's not out of the question that the Fed may need to raise rates again," Dr Yellen said on Wednesday in an interview on CNBC, before acknowledging that a cut may also be in the cards. "If global growth really weakens and that spills over to the United States, or if financial conditions tighten more and we do see a weakening in the US economy, it's certainly possible the next move is a cut, but both outcomes are possible."

Dr Yellen's successor at the US central bank, Mr Jerome Powell, made a dramatic revision to the Fed's messaging last month, suggesting the Fed may be done raising interest rates in this economic expansion. On Jan 30, the Fed's post-meeting statement said officials would be "patient" on policy and signalled the next adjustment for rates may be up or down.

That's a sharp turn from mid-December when Fed officials pencilled in two hikes for this year.

Dr Yellen said she continued to see the US economy as "solid and strong", driven by consumer demand that is being boosted by rising wages.

"I still expect the most likely outcome is solid growth in 2019" even as growth will likely come in well below the 3 per cent level probably achieved last year, she said.

She also outlined a number of threats, including slowing global growth, disruptions to international trade, the UK's impending exit from the European Union and a tightening of financial conditions.

"What's going on now reminds me a lot of 2015, 2016," she said. Under her leadership, policy makers pivoted from projecting four rate hikes for the year to making a single move in December as spillovers from weaker growth in China dented the US outlook.

Mr Powell has also invoked the experience of 2016 to emphasise the importance of policy flexibility.

The Fed's hand should also be stayed, she said, by the lack of any serious inflationary pressures.

"Now that they're in a range of neutral, it's not necessary to act preemptively," she said.

Dr Yellen served one term as Fed chair from 2014 to 2018. President Donald Trump broke with recent tradition by not offering her a second term in favour of Mr Powell.

BLOOMBERG

Australia's NAB chief exec and chairman quit

Departures follow probe which also exposes financial sector's widespread misconduct

SYDNEY • The chief executive and chairman of Australia's fourth-largest bank NAB are quitting, the biggest scalps following a major inquiry that levelled blistering criticism at the country's financial sector for widespread misconduct.

After a year-long inquiry that exposed a culture of greed in the financial sector, the Royal Commission this week issued a final report that singled out the National Australia Bank (NAB) chiefs for their apparent unwillingness to accept responsibility for past wrongs at the lender.

The departures of NAB chief executive Andrew Thorburn and chairman Ken Henry show the slow-burn pressure the inquiry has had on the country's biggest firms.

Mr Thorburn had ruffled shareholders by planning two months of leave on either side of the Royal Commission's delivery of its final report, which was hotly anticipated as a watershed moment for the country's banking industry.

The year-long inquiry uncovered a litany of wrongdoing across the industry – from charging dead people fees to advisers pushing customers into bad investments to meet bonus targets.

NAB staff accepted cash bribes to approve fraudulent mortgages and misled the regulator over a fees-for-no-service scandal.

After the report went public on Monday, Mr Thorburn cancelled the rest of his leave. While he released a statement disagreeing with the report's criticism of his attitude, he told local media on Tuesday that he was not sure he would last the week.

"I acknowledge that the bank has sustained damage as a result of its past practices and comments in the Royal Commission's final report about them," Mr Thorburn said in a statement yesterday.

"I have always sought to act in the best interests of the bank and customers and I know that I have always acted with integrity. However, I recognise there is a desire for change."

Mr Thorburn, who joined NAB as its head of retail banking in 2005, became CEO in August 2014. He will leave on Feb 28.

Mr Henry, a former central banker and adviser to the prime minister, will stay on as chairman until the lender hires a new CEO. NAB said board member Phil Chronican, a former executive at larger rival Westpac Banking Corp, will be interim CEO.

Analysts see NAB's chief customer officer Mike Baird, a former premier of New South Wales state, as a likely successor.

The NAB bosses were questioned about "fees for no service" during the Royal Commission. Mr Thorburn and Mr Henry have been specifically called out for their intransigence in the final report issued by the retired judge who ran the inquiry, Mr Kenneth Hayne.

The inquiry singled out the pair for unusually stinging criticism. After hearing their testimony last November, Mr Hayne wrote: "I am not as confident as I would wish to be that the lessons of the past have been learnt.

"My fear – that there may be a wide gap between the public face NAB seeks to show and what it does in practice – remains."

REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

NAB chief executive Andrew Thorburn has been faulted for his apparent unwillingness to accept responsibility for past wrongs at the lender. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Heads that have rolled

Mr Andrew Thorburn, who resigned yesterday as the chief executive of National Australia Bank, is the latest head to roll amid scandals unearthed by the year-long inquiry into misconduct in Australia's financial industry. The other casualties are:

AMP CEO CRAIG MELLER, CHAIRMAN CATHERINE BRENNER

Mr Craig Meller resigned in April after the wealth management firm admitted to misleading the regulator over charging customers for services they didn't receive. Ms Catherine Brenner followed 10 days later, along with general counsel Brian Salter. Three directors quit the following month.

NAB HEAD OF CONSUMER BANKING ANDREW HAGGER

Mr Andrew Hagger was ousted in an executive reshuffle in September following a gruelling appearance at the Royal Commission, where he was grilled over his communications with the regulator on the bank's fees-for-no-service scandal. He was once considered a candidate to be the bank's next CEO.

IOOF CEO CHRIS KELAHER, CHAIRMAN GEORGE VENARDOS

Mr Chris Kelaher and Mr George Venardos stepped aside from the wealth manager in December after the prudential regulator took court action to disqualify them and three other executives for allegedly failing to act in the best interests of superannuation members. The inquiry heard pension fund members had been treated poorly, fiduciary duties breached and board minutes handwritten on scraps of paper.

FREEDOM INSURANCE CEO CRAIG ORTON

Mr Craig Orton quit the insurance minnow in November, having earlier told the commission about the firm's tactics of cold-calling people to sell life insurance, including to a 26-year-old man with Down syndrome, and using aggressive tactics to persuade customers not to cancel policies. Commissioner Kenneth Hayne said such behaviour was "unconscionable conduct".

Qantas cancels order for 8 A380 aircraft

Qantas' cancellation of its order for eight A380 aircraft puts the future of the flagship programme in further doubt. Since entering commercial service a decade back, the A380 has faced an ever-shrinking fan base. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SYDNEY • Airbus' long-suffering A380 superjumbo suffered another blow after Qantas Airways formally cancelled an outstanding order for the outsized aircraft whose future is once again on the line.

The Australian airline, one of the initial operators of the double-decker plane, scrubbed an order for eight aircraft, which has a list price in excess of US$445 million (S$604 million).

Sydney-based Qantas had been pushing back the 2006 commitment for the Airbus aircraft for years. In a statement yesterday, Qantas, however, said it will upgrade its existing fleet of 12 A380s, starting this year.

"These aircraft have not been part of the airline's fleet and network plans for some time," Qantas said in its statement, referring to the 2006 order.

The formal scrapping of the order puts the future of the flagship programme in further doubt. Gulf carrier Emirates, the primary operator of the A380, may convert some or all of its most recent 20 orders for the jet into smaller A350s, those familiar with the matter have said.

That switch would slash Airbus' order backlog of its largest passenger aircraft.

Qantas has had a fractured relationship with the A380. The airline made global headlines in late 2010, when an A380 en route from Singapore suffered a mid-flight engine explosion that ripped through the wing, though the aircraft returned to the airport safely and nobody was seriously hurt. Qantas grounded its fleet of A380s for a few weeks immediately after the incident.

For all its imposing size and commanding presence in the skies, the A380 has not managed to leave much of an imprint with most airlines, relegated instead to an afterthought for carriers who built their stables around nimbler planes.

Since entering commercial service a decade back, the A380 has faced an ever-shrinking fan base.

Passengers love the plane for its modern layout, perks like spacious bars in business class and even enclosed cabins and showers in some first-class offerings, but airlines have been much harder to win over.

Some early prospective customers dropped out, while others scaled back their order book.

Only Emirates became a true champion of the A380, building a large part of its globe-spanning fleet around the plane, with more than 100 already in operation.

BLOOMBERG

Thomas Cook willing to sell its airline business to raise cash

LONDON • The world's oldest tour operator Thomas Cook said yesterday it was willing to sell its airline business to raise cash and fund its fight back from a torrid 2018 amid signs of a tough 2019.

The 176-year-old firm was brought to its knees last year when a heatwave in northern Europe deterred holiday makers from booking lucrative last minute deals, leading to two major profit warnings and talk of a need to raise funds.

The British group said that rather than launch a rights issue, it would consider all options for the most successful part of the business to enable it to invest in its own hotels, improve its digital sales offering and drive further cost savings. "We are at an early stage in this review process which will consider all options to enhance value to shareholders and intensify our strategic focus," chief executive Peter Fankhauser said.

The Group Airline comprises Germany's Condor, and United Kingdom, Scandinavian and Spanish divisions. It operates 103 aircraft and posted a 37 per cent rise in operating profit last year to £129 million (S$225.8 million).

Thomas Cook said it had made progress in managing its cost base but bookings for this summer reflected uncertainty, especially in Britain. Last year's winter trading was hit by the long hot summer, with fewer customers willing to book holidays and average selling prices fell 10 per cent. This summer, tour operator bookings fell 12 per cent though pricing was slightly higher.

Its underlying loss from operations in the three months to the end of December expanded to £60 million. Net debt stood at £1.6 billion and it said it had met its bank covenant tests. The group had a market valuation of £478 million at the close on Wednesday.

It reiterated its full-year outlook.

The airline business fared much better than the tour operator segment last year, and grew its profit by £35 million. The tour operator business profit fell £88 million. REUTERS

Asian banks on watch with trillion-dollar Libor transition

Lenders here on 'Phase Zero' as they wait out the global shift to alternate reference rates

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SPHmagazines

Wirecard CEO Markus Braun at the company headquarters in Aschheim near Munich, southern Germany, in a photo taken last year. The 49-year-old Austrian computer scientist has spent more than a decade fighting off critics whose whispering campaign burst into the headlines again last week. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Fraud allegations put Wirecard's shy billionaire CEO in spotlight

German e-payment firm pushes back: As it grows bigger, so does the target on its back

NEW YORK • In his 17 years as chief executive officer of Germany's Wirecard, Mr Markus Braun has gained plenty of experience fighting off sceptics and critics.

But the stakes have never been this high, for Mr Braun has taken this complex financial-plumbing operation with roots in pornography and online gaming into the most exclusive preserve of German business: the 30-company DAX stock index.

His company's €16 billion (S$25 billion) market value about matches Deutsche Bank's; Mr Braun's 7 per cent stake makes him a billionaire.

Which is why it was just a matter of time before the accusations of cooking the books and fraud re-emerged.

The 49-year-old Austrian computer scientist has spent more than a decade fighting off critics whose whispering campaign burst into the headlines again last week.

A Financial Times (FT) report on suspect transactions in Asia sent the company's shares plummeting.

Mr Braun quickly fired back, accusing detractors of spreading false and slanderous information. He has said he sees the attacks as a chance to strengthen the company.

"Whenever you stick your head out, some people will like it and some won't," he said in a September interview at Wirecard's headquarters outside Munich.

"That's a good thing in an open and pluralistic society and it's also expressed in capital markets. It can make you stronger and more robust if you focus on the positive and manage to make something positive from negative energy."

SHORT-SELLERS

German regulators have gone after short-sellers – speculators who bet on shares' declines – in the past for allegedly seeking to manipulate the stock.

Following the latest news, the regulator is again looking for signs of possible market manipulation, and Munich prosecutors are reviewing the facts to decide whether to open a probe.

The authorities in Singapore are also looking into the matter.

The probe of potential market manipulation has yet to conclude, a spokesman for the German watchdog, Bafin, said in an e-mail response to questions.

Centre stage is not where Mr Braun is comfortable, he says. Based in a suburban office park a world away from the glittering urban towers that house most financial powerhouses, he calls himself shy. That has left open questions about the company's stunning growth the past two years.

"Wirecard was quick to try to get ahead of this, but it's still hard... to put it to bed," said Mr Markus Friebel, an analyst at Independent Research in Frankfurt. "If this was an attack, then it fell on fertile ground. The company's business model is very complex and it has a lot of subsidiaries."

At the heart of Wirecard's strategy is the notion that cash is obsolete and that technology is driving huge growth in payment volumes at ever-lower cost.

The firm serves as a middleman for consumers, merchants and banks, providing software and systems for online payments and fraud protection.

It has ridden a wave of investor enthusiasm for payments firms seen to be at the cutting edge of financial technology.

Revenue about doubled since 2016 to €2.1 billion last year, following the acquisition of at least 18 companies for more than €1 billion in recent years.

Financial metrics, though, are no longer the most pressing issue for many Wirecard investors.

A Jan 30 Financial Times report described allegedly fraudulent flows of money overseen by an executive in the Asia-Pacific region. A second FT report detailed how a law firm found evidence indicating Wirecard had committed serious offences in several jurisdictions.

Wirecard rebuked both stories, calling them "inaccurate, misleading and defamatory".

TRANSPARENCY

"I think companies don't normally give insight into such compliance processes," Mr Braun said on a conference call with analysts and investors on Monday to spell out its handling of the allegations.

"Even though we don't see it in any way as material, we think it is our, let's say, obligation to be fully transparent and give this confidence to the market."

A Wirecard employee in Singapore alleged in April that a member of the company's finance team engaged in potential accounting breaches, he said.

"There were personal animosities between employees involved," said Mr Braun.

"We think the whole issue is not so much an accounting, compliance or whatever issue, but an issue between people. Such things happen, where there are human beings, there are sometimes emotions."

The alleged breaches took place between 2015 and last year and relate to revenue totalling €6.9 million, costs of €4.1 million and intellectual property valued at €2.6 million, according to the company.

While Wirecard is still waiting on the final report of a law firm it asked to investigate the matter alongside its own probe, "we consider the whole issue as resolved, so we do not expect any material findings here", Mr Braun said.

Founded in 1999, Wirecard initially provided financial services to online gambling and adult websites but nearly foundered following the collapse of the tech bubble.

Mr Braun was named CEO in 2002 and said he put as much as €75 million of his own funds into the firm – money he'd made on successful bets on tech companies, according to an interview with Manager Magazin.

Unlike North American tech billionaires, Mr Braun usually sports a suit instead of a hoodie, but no tie. He enjoys few extravagances other than skiing and the opera.

He received a degree in computer science from the Technical University of Vienna and a doctorate in social and economic sciences, according to his LinkedIn profile. He worked as a management consultant before he was recruited to Wirecard.

While he says the FT report has not hurt the company's business, not everyone's convinced.

"There is so much hype around Wirecard and they are so highly-valued that it doesn't take much to cause the shares to tumble," said Mr Friebel. "The question is just how sustainable that erosion of trust that we saw last week will be." BLOOMBERG

UNFAZED BY ATTACKS

Whenever you stick your head out, some people will like it and some won't. That's a good thing in an open and pluralistic society and it's also expressed in capital markets. It can make you stronger and more robust if you focus on the positive and manage to make something positive from negative energy.

MR MARKUS BRAUN, accusing detractors of spreading false and slanderous information following a Financial Times report on suspect transactions in Asia which sent the company's shares plummeting.

HANDLING ALLEGATIONS

I think companies don't normally give insight into such compliance processes. Even though we don't see it in any way as material, we think it is our, let's say, obligation to be fully transparent and give this confidence to the market.

MR BRAUN, on reports saying the company had allegedly committed serious offences.

EU slashes growth forecast amid trade tensions

BRUSSELS • The European Commission sharply cut yesterday its forecasts for economic growth in the euro zone this year and the next because of an expected slowdown in the largest countries of the bloc caused by global trade tensions and growing public debt.

In its quarterly economic forecasts, the EU executive also revised downwards its estimates for inflation in the 19-country currency bloc next year, which now is expected to be lower than forecast by the European Central Bank – likely complicating the bank's plans for an interest rate hike this year.

The Commission said euro zone growth will slow to 1.3 per cent this year from 1.9 per cent last year, and is expected to rebound in 2020 to 1.6 per cent.

The new estimates are less optimistic than the Commission's previous forecasts, released in November, when it expected the euro zone to grow 1.9 per cent this year and 1.7 per cent in 2020.

Growth in the 27-nation European Union – without Britain which is planning to leave next month – is expected to slow to 1.5 per cent this year from 2.1 per cent last year. Next year, the bloc is forecast to expand by 1.8 per cent.

All countries of the EU are poised to continue growing, with the bloc expected to post its seventh consecutive year of expansion, but the larger member states will brake significantly.

In Germany, the bloc's largest economy, growth is expected to slow to 1.1 per cent this year from 1.5 per cent last year. The Commission had previously forecast 1.8 per cent growth for Germany this year.

France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands are also forecast to reduce the pace of their expansion, with Italy expected to be the slowest economy in the whole EU with a mere 0.2 per cent growth this year.

The Commission cited global trade tensions and China's slowdown as the main drags for EU's economy.

But it also mentioned renewed concerns on debt sustainability, mostly in Italy, as a cause for the slowdown as Rome passed a free-spending budget forecast to have limited effects on growth.

The economic slowdown forecast by the Commission is worse than that seen by the ECB in its latest projections released in December, when the bank expected the euro zone to grow by 1.7 per cent this year. In a further concern for the ECB, the Commission expects euro zone inflation to be at 1.4 per cent this year, below ECB estimates of 1.6 percent rate, and further away from the bank's target of a rate close to 2.0 per cent.

After December, ECB policymakers have said that the bank's new forecasts next month are likely to be revised downwards. REUTERS

The Commission said euro zone growth will slow to 1.3 per cent this year from 1.9 per cent last year, and is expected to rebound in 2020 to 1.6 per cent.

Spotify sets sights on podcast streaming with $679m investment

NEW YORK • Spotify, the world's leading music streaming platform, on Wednesday announced an ambitious plan to become a top streamer of podcast content.

The Sweden-based company plans to invest US$500 million (S$679 million) on non-music streaming this year, seeking to dominate its listener base by scooping up American podcasting companies Gimlet Media and Anchor.

Spotify already boasts a presence in podcasting, having acquired shows from actress and comedian Amy Schumer and rapper Joe Budden.

By snagging Gimlet – the New York-based narrative podcasting company founded in 2014 – along with Anchor, a platform to create, distribute and monetise podcasts, the company aims to "meaningfully accelerate our path to becoming the world's leading audio platform" and "give users around the world access to the best podcast content", its chief executive officer Daniel Ek said in a statement.

Spotify did not specify the cost of acquiring the podcasting companies, but said it would invest between US$400 million and US$500 million this year for multiple acquisitions.

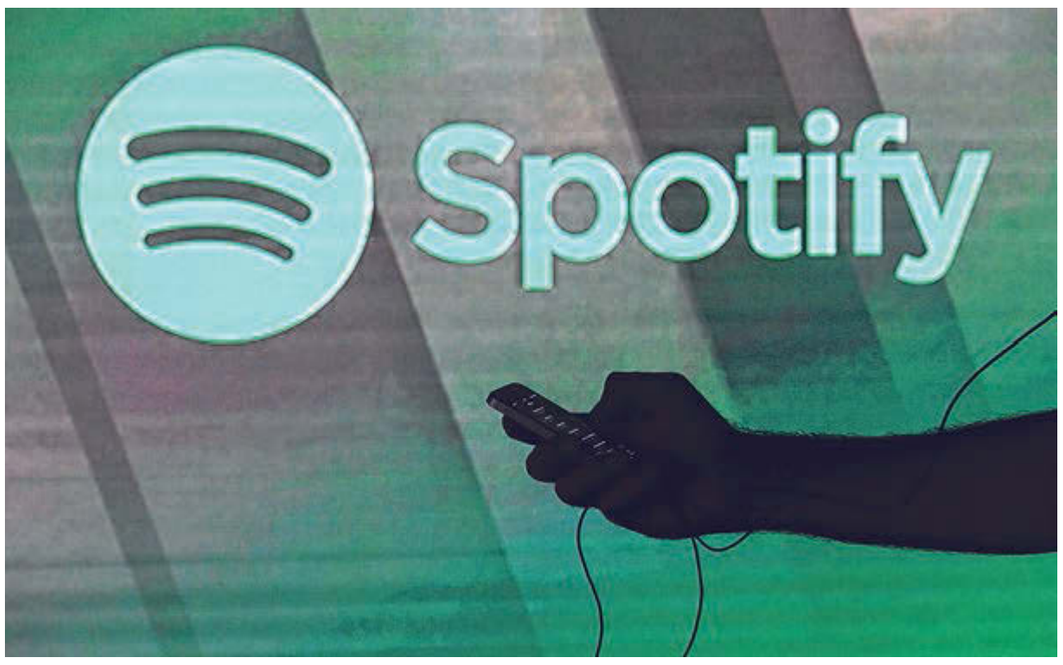
The platform also announced in Wednesday's quarterly results that it had 96 million paying subscribers at the end of December, 36 per cent more than at 2017's close. The growth is largely related to positive results from the company's partnership with Google Home as well as its promotional holiday campaign.

Including those who use the platform's free option that includes advertising, Spotify claims 207 million monthly active users.

The platform generated sales of €1.5 billion for the quarter, up 30 per cent year on year, while its net profit totalled €442 million.

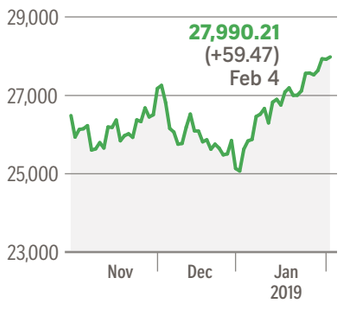
Spotify, founded in 2005, saw a net loss of €78 million last year, however, and an operating loss of €43 million. This year, the company will likely remain in the red: It anticipates an operating loss between €200 million and €360 million.

Shortly after opening trades on the New York Stock Exchange, the company's stock had dipped about 5 per cent. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



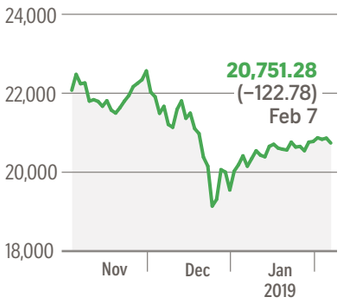
Spotify has bought podcasting companies Gimlet Media and Anchor as part of an ambitious plan to become a leading audio platform. The company boasts 96 million paying subscribers and 207 million monthly active users. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Hang Seng



Shanghai Comp

Nikkei 225



Dow Jones

BullsAndBears

STI gets a boost as sentiment improves

Gainers outpace losers, with banks doing well; mixed bag elsewhere in region

Navin Sregantan

Investors came back from the Chinese New Year holidays in a positive mood that helped nudge the local market north yesterday.

The Straits Times Index (STI) added 16.08 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 3,200.64, bringing its gain so far this year to 4.2 per cent.

Turnover stood at 818 million shares worth $920 million with gainers outpacing losers 205 to 138.

Volumes fell below the Singapore Exchange's (SGX) daily average, due in part to some north Asian markets remaining closed.

The most active was Ezion Holdings, down 6 per cent to 4.7 cents with 76 million shares done.

DBS analyst Ho Pei Hwa downgraded the marine firm on potential asset impairments, a slower-than-expected ramp-up in utilisation and revenue.

Six of the 30 STI constituents ended the day in the red. Index-listed companies were also among the day's most heavily traded.

Genting Singapore was the most active blue chip, closing flat at $1.10 on trade of 30.3 million shares.

Meanwhile, food and beverage player ThaiBev closed 4.5 per cent down at 73.5 cents with 24.9 million shares changing hands.

SingTel fared well, adding 1 per cent to $3.05, and the banks thrived as well: DBS gained 0.6 per cent to $24.33; OCBC added 1 per cent to $11.49; and United Overseas Bank inched up 0.1 per cent to $25.28.

IG market strategist Pan Jingyi noted: "A couple of gainers had been taking the headlines, including Best World International and ST Engineering."

Skincare maker and distributor Best World gained 6 per cent in early trade, prompting the SGX to query its unusual price movement. The stock closed 8.6 per cent up at $3.04.

ST Engineering hit an 18-month high, up 1.6 per cent to $3.75, "as investors are enthused by expected expansion to its business with news of its latest capital injection in its joint venture", Ms Pan said.

Penny stocks had their day, too, with Alliance Mineral gaining 15.2 per cent to 20.5 cents. January's lithium output at its Bald Hill Mine in Australia grew 28 per cent from December, a record for the miner. Procurri, which had a second expression of interest from a third party for a possible voluntary general offer, gained 8.1 per cent to 33.5 cents.

It was a mixed bag elsewhere, with Malaysia and Australia closing higher, South Korea ending the day flat, and Japan closing lower.

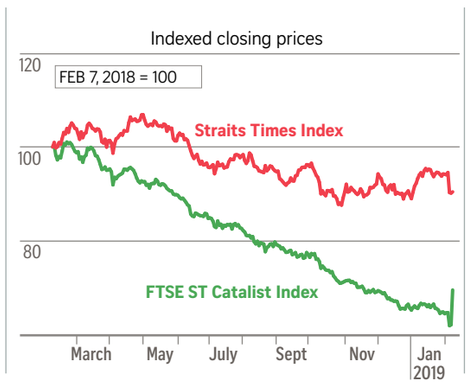
Most attention was paid to the Reserve Bank of Australia's dovish shift, which opened the door to a possible rate cut. That sent the ASX 200 up 1.1 per cent while the Aussie dollar took a hit.

navinsre@sph.com.sg

DAILY

Straits Times Index

Feb 7, 2019
3,200.64 ▲
+16.08 (+0.50%)
Current streak
1 day
Day high
3,215.90
Day low
3,194.18
52-week high
3,615.28 (May 2, 2018)
52-week low
2,966.45 (Oct 30, 2018)



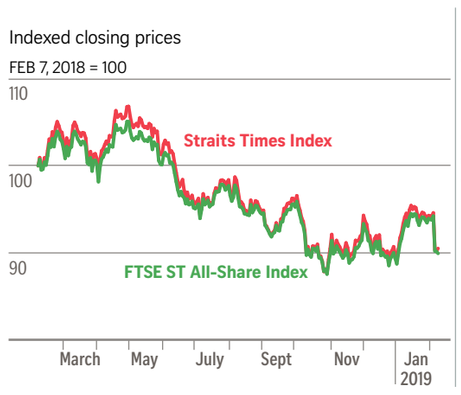
FTSE ST Catalist Index

Feb 7, 2019
▲ **301.29**
+0.15 (+0.05%)
Current streak
2 days
Day high
301.91
Day low
299.82
52-week high
469.26 (Feb 21, 2018)
52-week low
300.24 (Feb 1, 2019)

DAILY

FTSE ST All-Share Index

Feb 7, 2019
▲ **778.14**
+3.63 (+0.47%)
Current streak
1 day
Day high
781.39
Day low
776.75
52-week high
868.02 (April 30, 2018)
52-week low
722.91 (Oct 30, 2018)



Ads the way to go for US banks to win market share: Study

NEW YORK • In a world with fewer branches, banks will need to rely more heavily on advertising to win market share, according to a study released yesterday by McKinsey.

"The correlation between adding capacity and gaining share has started to break down," said Mr Pradip Patiath, senior partner at the management consulting firm.

The percentage of customers who prefer to transact in branches declined to 26 per cent from 38 per cent in 2016, the study found.

Branches are still among the factors McKinsey uses to determine opportunities to gain market share, but marketing, digital tools and customer satisfaction are becoming more influential.

Banks are rushing to develop digital tools to keep customers engaged, but effective marketing of those apps can determine who wins more consumer dollars.

Brand recall is strongly correlated with deposit share, McKinsey found, which explains why some of the largest banks are ramping up marketing investments or experimenting with new advertisements. JPMorgan Chase & Co's marketing expenditure jumped 13 per cent last year to US$3.3 billion (S$4.5 billion) as the largest US bank by assets sought even more market share.

"Banks need to get more savvy about marketing," Mr Patiath said. "Instead of putting an ad in the Wall Street Journal or in the Super Bowl, can I find a way to get the same reach for a fraction of the cost?" REUTERS

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY TRADED	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
278	245	Ascendas Reit		274	+3	13324	5.8	1.3
192	161	CapitaCom Trust		189	unch	10302	4.6	1
380	298	CapitaLand		335	+3	7969	3.6	0.7
243	195	CapitaMall Trust		237	-2	9958	4.9	1.2
1359	780	CityDev		921	+13	1224	2	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro		236	+4	5042	4.4	2
3128	2265	DBS Grp		2433	+15	3196	5.9	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US$	899	unch	382	2.3	-
133	85.5	Genting Sing		110	unch	30329	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res		25.5	+0.5	17543	3.2	0.6
38	23	HPH Trust USD	US$	26	unch	5825	10.1	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US$	702	+3	2838	2.8	0.3
6974	1099	JMH USD	US$	6682	+87	304	2.4	0.7
4078	3155	JSH USD	US$	3765	-26	171	0.8	0.4
3828	2766	Jardine C&C		3784	-10	184	3	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp		600 cd	-1	3361	5	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank		1149	+11	2569	3.2	1.2
564	455	SATS		480	unch	1067	3.8	3.3
805	672	SGX		763	+8	1852	3.9	9.5
1184	914	SIA		966	unch	896	4.1	0.8
292	231	SPH		250	+2	1359	5.2	1.1
376	321	ST Engineering		375	+6	3685	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind		255	-2	3090	2	0.7
358	283	Singtel		305	+3	16197	6.7	1.7
92	57.5	ThaiBev		73.5 xd	-3.5	24906	0.9	3.6
3037	2380	UOB		2528	+3	2261	4	1.2
898	591	UOL		666	+6	708	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp		1600	+10	1122	3.8	2.1
335	297	Wilmar Intl		332	+1	2873	3	1
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD		143	+2	22689	3.1	1

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY TRADED	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
278	245	Ascendas Reit		274	+3	13324	5.8	1.3
120	105	Ascott Reit		116 xd	-4	4474	6.2	1
74.5	59	Bumitama Agri		69.5	+0.5	686	1.1	1.6
178	143	CDL HTrust		167 cd	unch	3986	-	1.1
192	161	CapitaCom Trust		189	unch	10302	4.6	1
380	298	CapitaLand		335	+3	7969	3.6	0.7
243	195	CapitaMall Trust		237	-2	9958	4.9	1.2
164	133	CapitaR China Tr		148 cd	+2	2438	6.9	1
1359	780	CityDev		921	+13	1224	2	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro		236	+4	5042	4.4	2
3128	2265	DBS Grp		2433	+15	3196	5.9	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US$	899	unch	382	2.3	-
73.5	59	Far East HTrust		66	unch	1432	-	0.8
184	150	First Resources		173	+5	216	3.9	2.3
231	212	Frasers Cpt Tr		226	unch	851	5.3	108.7
112	101	Frasers L&I Tr		109	-2	17158	6.3	1.2
133	85.5	Genting Sing		110	unch	30329	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res		25.5	+0.5	17543	3.2	0.6
224	167	GuocoLand Ltd		182	unch	159	3.8	0.6
38	23	HPH Trust USD	US$	26	unch	5825	10.1	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US$	702	+3	2838	2.8	0.3
6974	1099	JMH USD	US$	6682	+87	304	2.4	0.7
4078	3155	JSH USD	US$	3765	-26	171	0.8	0.4
3828	2766	Jardine C&C		3784	-10	184	3	1.8
58	44.5	Kep Infra Tr		50.5	+0.5	4727	7.4	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp		600 cd	-1	3361	5	1
124	108	Keppel Reit		119	unch	7342	4.7	0.9
215	151	M1		205 cd	unch	365	5.5	3.6
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US$	194	unch	67	1.5	1.4
186	152	Mapletree Com Tr		181	unch	14463	5	1.2
206	184	Mapletree Ind Tr		201	+2	3298	5.8	1.4
140	118	Mapletree Log Tr		139	unch	10179	5.5	1.2
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr		125	unch	9060	6	0.9
83	73	NetLink NBN Tr		78.5	unch	4223	-	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank		1149	+11	2569	3.2	1.2
200	136	OUE		152	unch	198	2	0.3
87	64.5	OUE HTrust		71 xd	-2	1680	-	0.9
250	157	Olam Intl		190	+8	584	3.9	1
59	28	Oxley		30.5	unch	542	4.9	0.9
291	256	ParkwayLife Reit		280 xd	+1	701	4.6	1.5
121	98	Raffles Medical		110	-1	1687	2	2.6
564	455	SATS		480	unch	1067	3.8	3.3
805	672	SGX		763	+8	1852	3.9	9.5
1184	914	SIA		966	unch	896	4.1	0.8
337	220	SIA Engineering		250	+1	144	5.2	1.9
292	231	SPH		250	+2	1359	5.2	1.1
103	98	SPHREIT		102	unch	843	5.4	1.1
376	321	ST Engineering		375	+6	3685	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind		255	-2	3090	2	0.7
275	149	Sembcorp Marine		158	unch	5892	1.3	1.4
58	39	Silverlake Axis		49.5	-0.5	3938	6.1	7.2
147	88.5	SingPost		95.5 cd	+0.5	2596	3.7	1.3
358	283	Singtel		305	+3	16197	6.7	1.7
286	158	StarHub		189	+7	4484	8.5	5.8
74	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit		71 xd	-1.5	1614	6.4	0.8
199	163	Suntec Reit		189	unch	6939	5.3	0.9
92	57.5	ThaiBev		73.5 xd	-3.5	24906	0.9	3.6
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical		7.8	-0.1	22197	-	2.8
3037	2380	UOB		2528	+3	2261	4	1.2
898	591	UOL		666	+6	708	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp		1600	+10	1122	3.8	2.1
335	297	Wilmar Intl		332	+1	2873	3	1
226	183	Wing Tai		203	+1	748	3.9	0.5
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD		143	+2	22689	3.1	1
182	116	Yanlord Land		133	+3	3525	5.1	0.5

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	138 cd	unch	118	7.5	1
68.5	48	Accordia Golf Tr	54.5	-0.5	322	7.1	0.6
87	74	Ascendas-hTrust	84.5	unch	447	-	0.9
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	113	+1	1282	5.4	1.3
58	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	13.1	+0.1	6916	49.6	0.2
64	48	Banyan Tree	59.5	+1	281	1.7	0.8
304	115	Best World	304	+24	5335	1.3	10.9
85.5	76	Boustead	79.5	unch	68	3.8	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	86.5	unch	30	8.1	2.3
632	521	Bukit Sembawang	561	+1	17	3.2	1.1
87	65.5	Cache Log Trust	71.5	+0.5	1711	8.3	1.1
52	39.5	Centurion	40.5	unch	46	6.2	0.7
166	104	China Aviation	117	+1	1168	3.8	1
46	29.5	China Everbright	35.5	-1	5057	1.4	0.7
165	90.5	China Sunsine	131	+3	447	2.3	1.5
103	64	Chip Eng Seng	70	unch	1410	5.7	0.6
53.5	31.5	Cosco	35.5	unch	4997	-	1.5
700	302	Delong	585	-1	10	-	0.6
27.5	17.5	Duty Free Intl	20.5 cd	-0.5	219	9	1.3
78	67.5	EC World Reit	73	+0.5	425	8.3	0.8
59	47	ESR-REIT	51.5	-0.5	3339	7.5	1.1
140	92	First Reit	111	+1	1108	7.7	1.1
151	135	Frasers Com Tr	151	+3	3807	6.4	1
80	66.5	Frasers HTrust	73.5	unch	505	-	1
25.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	19.6	unch	535	5.1	1.2
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	77	unch	445	3	2.4
67.5	52	Health Mgt Intl	54	unch	198	0.6	5.2
279	73	Hi-P Intl	94	+2	6636	26.6	1.4
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	264	-1	65	4.9	0.6
80.5	71	IREIT Global	75	unch	239	7.9	1
38	18.3	Indofood Agri	22.5	+0.5	296	-	0.3
84	43	Japfa	81.5	-2	1416	0.6	1.5
76.5	49	KSH	51.5	unch	127	4.3	0.9
85	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	67	+0.5	802	9.3	0.6
149	128	Keppel DC Reit	145	+1	6619	5	1.4
189	132	Keppel T&T	188	+1	74	-	1.2
11.9	7	KrisEnergy	8.4	unch	7483	-	1
71	44.5	Lian Beng	49	unch	835	4.6	0.4
41	18	Lippo Malls Tr	25	+0.5	6415	13.8	0.9
53	30	MM2 Asia	32.5	+0.5	458	-	1.8
96	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	85.5	+0.5	3025	6.5	0.8
120	95	Metro	100	unch	393	5	0.6
22.5	5	Noble	8.1	susp	-	-	-
63.4	45	OUE Com Reit	50.5 cd	unch	2574	6.9	0.7
66	54	PEC	56	-1.5	54	3.6	0.6
40	17	POSH	19	+0.9	28	-	0.6
64.5	44.5	Q&M Dental	50	unch	29	3.2	3.6
111	55.5	QAF Ltd	71.5	+2.5	119	7	0.8
124	96	Riverstone	113	-1	8	2	3.7
54.5	22	SIIC Environment	32	-0.5	202	-	0.5
45	38	Sabana Reit	41	-0.5	1126	7.8	0.7
119	90	Sheng Siong	112	unch	876	2.9	6.2
25.5	3.3	Sino Grandness	5.7	+0.5	1975	-	0.1
69	56	SoilbuildBizReit	59.5	-0.5	806	8.9	0.9
129	80.5	Tianjin ZX USD	87.5	+2	53	-	0.7
46.5	32.5	Tuan Sing	39 cd	-0.5	368	2.3	0.4
136	54	UMS	66.5	+3	8199	7.5	1.6
112	58.5	Valuetronics	72.5	+2.5	6058	6.3	166
15	8.3	Ying Li Intl	11.9	unch	1924	-	0.3
48.5	24	Yoma Strategic	32.5	-1	3472	0.8	0.9
33	16.1	Yongnam	17.6	-0.1	546	-	0.3

ETFs

52-Week High	52-Week Low	Counter	Last Sale	+/-	Vol ('000)	Last Quote Buy	Last Quote Sell
116.9	110	ABF SG Bond ETF	113.1	+0.1	13	113	113.1
93.8	82.5	CIMB APAC Div US$	US88.8	-	-	90.5	91.2
1176	626	CIMBASEAN40 US$	US1003	-	-	1000	1006
12895	11025	GLD US$	US12329	-91	5	12321	12330
1419	1330	IS ASIA HYG S$D	1384	+19	2	1374	1384
1073	970	IS ASIA HYG US$	US1021	+7	1	1018	1022
1071	1002	IS Asia BND US	US1043	+4	3	1041	1045
1016	467	IS MS INDIA US$	US838	+19	210	839	842
104.5	94.4	Lion-Phillip S-REIT	103.2	+0.3	275	103	103.3
375	302	Nikko AM STI ETF	328	+2	3	327	328
100.6	98.8	NikkoAM SGD IGBond ETF	100.1	+0.1	13	100	100.2
84.2	76.3	NikkoAM-STC A_REIT US$	US82.5	-	-	86.6	87
148.2	104.7	NikkoAM-STC Asia REIT	117.5	+0.2	189	117.6	117.9
105.7	99	PHIL SING INC	105.6	+0.8	13	105.7	105.8
130	93.2	Phil Ap Div Reit US$	US103	-	-	103.7	104.1
365.8	300	STI ETF	319.9 xd	+1.7	235	319.8	319.9
4164	3373	XT ASX200 US$	US3700	-	-	-	-
685.5	375.1	XT MSBrazil US$	US513.1	-30.6	0	511.4	516.8
2090	1470	XT MSCHINA US$	US1704	-	-	1724	1729
8311	6252	XT MSKorea US$	US7020	-	-	-	-
209.1	154.9	XT MSPHILS US$	US191.7	-1.3	1	187	200
634	530	XT MSPacXJp US$	US599	+48	5	594	603
3014	2532	XT MSTaiwan US$	US2640	-	-	2603	-
5292	4210	XT S&P500 US$	US4814	-	-	-	-
4044	2850	XT Vietnam US$	US2967	-24	3	2950	3200

Gainers

BY CENTS

	CLOSE	UP	%
JMH USD	6682	118.0	1.3
SEVAK	385	36.0	10.3
Best World	304	24.0	8.6
DBS Grp	2433	15.0	0.6
CityDev	921	13.0	1.4
OCBC Bank	1149	11.0	1.0
Delfi	145	10.0	7.4
Venture Corp	1600	10.0	0.6
Olam Intl	190	8.0	4.4
SGX	763	8.0	1.1

BY PERCENTAGE

	CLOSE	%	UP
AnAn Intl	0.8	300.0	0.6
Plastoform	2.1	61.5	0.8
Oceanus	0.4	33.3	0.1
Asiatic	0.9	28.6	0.2
TEE Intl R	2.3	27.8	0.5
Nico Steel	0.6	20.0	0.1
Pan Asian	1.3	18.2	0.2
Mun Siong Engg	4.7	17.5	0.7
Compact Metal	2.8	16.7	0.4
TEE Intl R1	1.5	15.4	0.2

Losers

BY CENTS

	CLOSE	DOWN	%
JSH USD	3765	-35.3	-0.7
Great Eastern	2583	-17.0	-0.7
Jardine C&C	3784	-10.0	-0.3
Top Global	17	-8.0	-32.0
NutryFarm	15.9	-6.1	-27.7
Ascott Reit	116	-4.0	-3.3
UIC	295	-4.0	-1.3
Shinvest	70	-3.5	-4.8
ThaiBev	73.5	-3.5	-4.5
Chemical Ind	73	-3.0	-3.9

BY PERCENTAGE

	CLOSE	% DOWN
P5 Capital	0.9	-57.1 -1.2
ISR Capital	0.2	-50.0 -0.2
MDR	0.1	-50.0 -0.1
Pine Cap	0.1	-50.0 -0.1
Renaissance United .	0.1	-50.0 -0.1
Top Global	17	-32.0 -8.0
Regal Intl	4	-31.0 -1.8
MMP Resources	0.5	-28.6 -0.2
NutryFarm	15.9	-27.7 -6.1
Accrelist	0.3	-25.0 -0.1

Most active

	VOLUME
Ezion	76,030,900
Rex Intl	50,573,700
Disa	42,826,800
Genting Sing	30,329,900
ThaiBev	24,906,400
YZJ Shipbldg SGD	22,689,700
Thomson Medical	22,197,200
Alliance Mineral	19,087,200
Golden Agri-Res	17,543,900
Frasers L&I Tr	17,158,900
Market volume	816,918,000

	VALUE ($)
DBS Grp	77,799,664
UOB	57,136,213
Singtel	49,565,150
Ascendas Reit	36,693,626
Genting Sing	33,746,436
YZJ Shipbldg SGD	32,383,400
OCBC Bank	29,500,644
JMH USD	27,795,838
HongkongLand USD	26,996,642
CapitaLand	26,783,573
Market value	913,531,000

Price and volume movers

	VOL	CLOSE($)	CHANGE	+/-
AnAn Intl	32.1	0.008	+0.006	+300.00
DISA	42,826.8	0.003	-0.001	-25.00
Amplefield Ltd	1,549.9	0.025	+0.002	+8.70
Shinvest	201.7	0.700	-0.035	-4.76
Alliance Mineral	19,087.2	0.205	+0.027	+15.17
MSC	50.1	0.260	+0.030	+13.04
Plastoform	7.9	0.021	+0.008	+61.54
Top Global	10.0	0.170	-0.080	-32.00
ValueMax	612.5	0.275	+0.010	+3.77
Japan Foods	165.0	0.420	-0.020	-4.55

Shows the stocks with the highest combination of price change and of daily activity relative to the three-month average volume

Bonds

Company	Last Sale	+or-	Vol ('000)
CapMallTrb3.08%21022	101.5	-	-
CityDev NCCPS	108	unch	1
DBS Bk 4.7% NCPS	10530	-20	1
FPTrea 3.65%n220522	101.2	+0.2	20
Hyflux 6% CPS	6537	susp	-
UE Pref	190	-	-

Alibaba rival Pinduoduo aims to raise $2b from Wall Street

It will use new funds to expand, make strategic acquisitions

BEIJING • Chinese firm Pinduoduo, an ambitious rival of e-commerce giant Alibaba, plans to raise about US$1.5 billion (S$2 billion) from Wall Street to fund its expansion.

The Shanghai-based company, which specialises in the sale of very low-priced goods, said in a stock market filing on Tuesday that it intends to issue some 37 million new shares while stockholders sell about 14.8 million.

Its shares fell more than 6 per cent on Wednesday, after the announcement.

At its current Nasdaq stock price of around US$29, the deal could let the group raise about US$1.5 billion, a Bloomberg calculation shows.

Founded in 2015 by former Google employee Colin Huang, Pinduoduo had a dazzling start and successfully established a place between Alibaba and JD.com, the two titans of the Chinese e-commerce market.

Mr Huang's recipe: to allow users to participate in group purchases of everyday consumer goods – from kitchen utensils and socks to food, ultimately obtaining extremely cheap prices. This niche of rock-bottom prices has ensured its popularity among the working classes and in rural areas.

Pinduoduo, with its social network features, also encourages customers to associate with each other, and with friends and relatives, to obtain better prices through group sales.

It made its stock market debut on Nasdaq last July, raising US$1.6 billion.

The new funds would be used "to enhance and expand its business operations... including potential strategic investments and acquisitions", the firm said in the statement.

Pinduoduo, which at the end of September claimed some 385.5 million active users – more than doubled in one year – recorded some US$50 billion in annual transactions on its platform.

In the third quarter of last year, it had a turnover of US$491 million but has struggled to be profitable, recording a loss of US$160 million in the same period.

Pinduoduo, sometimes compared to US discount retailer Costco, has seen its share price climb almost 50 per cent since its debut last July.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Workers inspecting a vehicle body at Volvo's plant in the US state of South Carolina. Volvo has been on a growth path under Chinese owner Geely's umbrella, with four straight years of record sales, aided by its steady push into premium cars, pitting it against Daimler's Mercedes-Benz as well as BMW. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Volvo's revenue up 21% but profit margins slip

CONTINUED PRESSURE

For 2019, we see another year of volume growth as we continue to benefit from our strong product programme and increased capacity. But we have to be realistic and acknowledge that margins will remain under continued pressure.

VOLVO CHIEF EXECUTIVE HAKAN SAMUELSSON

STOCKHOLM • Volvo Cars, owned by China's Geely, reported higher full-year revenue yesterday, but said its profit margins had slipped and were expected to remain under pressure this year.

Carmakers have faced rising costs and pricing pressure in some markets because of a trade war between Washington and Beijing last year, as well as slower demand from Europe and China, the biggest car market.

"For 2019, we see another year of volume growth as we continue to benefit from our strong product programme and increased capacity. But we have to be realistic and acknowledge that margins will remain under continued pressure," Volvo chief executive Hakan Samuelsson said in a statement.

Suppliers and carmakers have issued new warnings and results misses this year, with Daimler this week reporting a fall in fourth-quarter operating profit.

Volvo said its operating profit rose by 0.9 per cent to 14.2 billion Swedish kronor (S$2 billion) although its margin fell to 5.6 per cent from 6.7 per cent. This was despite its revenue last year rising by 21 per cent to 252.7 billion Swedish kronor.

Volvo has been on a growth path under Geely's umbrella, with four straight years of record sales, aided by its steady push into premium cars, pitting it against Daimler's Mercedes-Benz as well as BMW.

The Swedish-based firm postponed plans for a listing last year, citing the adverse impact of the tariff war and an industry downturn, while also taking on the costs of retooling its factories in an effort to limit the negative tariff impact. REUTERS

CompanyBriefs

Prudential Financial

Prudential Financial Inc yesterday reported a 12 per cent drop in adjusted operating income, partly due to a loss in its individual life insurance business and declines in other units.

The US No. 1 life insurer by assets reported adjusted operating income, which excludes realised gains and losses from investments, of US$1 billion (S$1.4 billion) or US$2.44 a share, compared with US$1.2 billion, or US$2.69 per share, in the year-ago quarter, said Reuters.

Analysts had expected US$2.78 per share, according to IBES data from Refinitiv.

Adjusted operating income for PGIM, Prudential's asset management arm, fell 20.6 per cent to US$243 million from US$306 million a year ago, the company said. PGIM managed US$1.16 trillion in assets as of Dec 31, US$6 billion more than at the end of the year-ago quarter.

Prudential's US individual life insurance unit reported a US$26 million adjusted operating income loss compared with US$98 million in income a year ago.

Charisma Energy Services

Catalist-listed Charisma Energy Services yesterday requested a suspension in the trading of its shares "with immediate effect".

This followed its disclosure on Monday that the firm is in talks with certain stakeholders such as bank lenders and creditors in relation to its financing and capitalisation structure.

Procurri Corporation

Enterprise hardware supplier Procurri Corporation yesterday said it had on Feb 4, 2019 received a second unsolicited, non-binding expression of interest from a third party to acquire the company through a possible voluntary general offer. It said that to the best of its knowledge, the second offeror is not in any way related to a proposed acquisition via a scheme announced on Feb 3, 2019 by New State Capital Partners. On Monday, it had named its first offeror, saying it has received a non-binding letter of intent from New State Capital Partners for the proposed acquisition of all the shares of the company, other than treasury shares and shares held by substantial shareholder Irrucorp, via a scheme of arrangement.

New State is a private investment firm which operates in the United States and focuses on investments in business, healthcare and industrial services industries. Irrucorp, in which Procurri chairman and global chief executive Sean Murphy and executive director and global president Edward Flachbarth are deemed to have interests, owns about 12.03 per cent in the firm as at March 16, 2018.

Interbank currency rates

Feb 7

Currencies	Against S$ Bid	Against S$ Offer	Against US$ Bid	Against US$ Offer
S$/US$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9616	0.9625	0.7092	0.7096
Canadian dollar	1.0233	1.0240	0.7549	0.7547
Euro	1.5389	1.5401	1.1350	1.1354
NZ dollar	0.9146	0.9150	0.6745	0.6746
Sterling pound	1.7501	1.7512	1.2907	1.2911
US dollar	1.3559	1.3564	-	-
S$/US$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	20.0963	20.1169	14.8214	14.8311
Danish kroner	20.6177	20.6284	15.2059	15.2082
Hong Kong dollar	17.28	17.29	12.7444	12.7449
Indian Rupee	1.90	1.90	1.3979	1.3981
Indonesia rupiah	0.0097	0.0097	0.0072	0.0072
Japanese yen	1.2333	1.2341	0.9096	0.9098
Korean won	0.1203	0.1205	0.0887	0.0888
Malaysian ringgit	33.27	33.33	24.5399	24.5700
New Taiwan dollar	4.4000	4.4018	3.2451	3.2452
Norwegian krone	15.8266	15.8399	11.6724	11.6779
Philippine peso	2.5940	2.5960	1.9131	1.9139
Saudi riyal	36.1525	36.1687	26.6631	26.6652
Swedish krona	14.6785	14.6887	10.8257	10.8292
Swiss franc	135.2654	135.3287	99.7606	99.7705
Thai Baht	4.3347	4.3391	3.1969	3.1990

Source: OCBC

Government securities

GOVERNMENT BONDS — Feb 7

Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	Day's High	Day's Low
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	101.95	101.96	101.95
5-Year	N519100A	2.000%	01-Feb-24	99.93	99.90	99.90
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	103.81	103.95	103.82
15-Year	NZ13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	111.77	111.80	111.65
20-Year	NZ16100X	2.250%	01-Aug-36	96.8	0.00	0.00
30-Year	NA16100H	2.750%	01-Mar-46	102.89	103.00	103.00

Note: Based on latest issue

Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore

MSCI INDICES

Feb 6	Index	In local curr % dy Change	In local curr % yr Change
World Preliminary	1564.8	-0.1	8.6
EAFE Preliminary	1080.4	0.0	7.2
Europe Preliminary	1513.9	0.0	7.8
Australia	1210.8	0.2	6.1
Austria Preliminary	553.3	1.1	11.1
Belgium Preliminary	1030.0	0.0	12.6
Canada Preliminary	2010.1	0.1	9.8
Denmark Preliminary	7926.3	-0.5	7.0
Finland Preliminary	726.7	1.1	11.3
France Preliminary	1837.6	-0.2	7.2
Germany Preliminary	906.9	-0.3	7.5
Greece Preliminary	45.9	-0.5	5.7
India	1290.0	1.2	2.2
Indonesia	7450.4	1.1	5.3
Ireland Preliminary	196.2	0.8	9.5
Israel Preliminary	256.0	-0.8	11.0
Italy Preliminary	678.5	0.7	9.1
Japan	946.4	0.0	5.9
Korea	663.9	0.0	9.9
Malaysia	584.5	0.0	0.5
Netherlands Preliminary	1615.3	1.1	10.8
New Zealand	137.8	0.0	3.8
Norway Preliminary	2924.9	-0.9	5.0
Pakistan	415.0	-0.9	16.3
Philippines	1368.2	-0.2	8.4
Portugal Preliminary	87.4	0.3	8.3
Singapore	1657.9	0.0	4.0
Singapore Free	356.5	0.0	4.0

Source: MSCI

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- Take preventive steps to protect their e-business from intrusion

Date: April 8
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Venue: Level 8 Tower Block SPH News Centre 1000 Toa Payoh North
Fee: $648 per participant

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Azhar Kasman is the Editor of Stomp, SPH's award-winning citizen-journalism site, and also a Content Strategist for SPH's English, Malay, Tamil Media Group. Besides his editorial duties, Azhar explores new digital technologies and innovations for the newsroom and works closely with business clients to help them conceptualise and execute their digital content strategies.

Navjot Pawera is the director and head of design at Buuuk, a Singapore-based tech studio that has helped government and private organisations win international awards with their innovative digital solutions. He had previously worked with clients in India and Norway before working in Singapore.

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Hoon Soon Kwan Anthony
洪祥冠

Age: 70

Passed away peacefully on 7 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Tang Lay Kuen Karen

Daughters:
Hoon Wei Ping Emily
Hoon Wei Yen Lena

Son-in-law:
Miguel Serrano

Brothers:
Hoong Ling Kuan
Hoong Kah Kuan
Hoong Kah Tong Thomas (deceased)
Hoong Kah Chuan

Sisters-in-law:
Lim Chai Yong
Teo Swee Huang Ivy
Lee Siew Eng Helen
Koh Mui Lang

Nephews:
Hoong Zhichun Peter
Hoong Wei Liang Terence
Hoong Wei Wen Roy

Niece-in-law:
Anggie Ong Huizhu

Nieces:
Hoong Wei Fen Rachel
Hoong Wei Shan Caroline
Hoong Hui Min
Hoong Huiling Michelle
Hoong Hui Li Joyce

Nephews-in-law:
Philemon Loh
Tan Say Hong
Fu Hongming Fabian
Hong Yushun

And all relatives and friends

Wake is held at 4 Carpmael Road, Singapore 429753.

Cortege leaves on Monday 11 February 2019 at 10.00am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 11.00am.

The family requests no wreaths please.

With Deepest Sympathy &
Heartfelt Condolences to our

Managing Director
Mr Hoong Kah Chuan (KC)

On the demise of his beloved brother

Mr Hoon Soon Kwan Anthony

Departed on 7 February 2019

From:
The Management and Staff of

Anda Hydraulics Asia Pte Ltd

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."
Ecclesiastes 3:11

Khoo Tjoe Sen
@ Magdalena Kusuma

Age: 95

Passed away on 5 February 2019 to join Yeo Cho Kheng (husband) and Jeremy Yeo (son) in God's heavenly kingdom.

She remains in the hearts of:

Children & Spouses:
Lim Soo Ngoh
Billy Yo & Elly Soetanto
Elaine Yeo & David Chow
Derrick Yeo & Teresa Yam

Grandchildren & Spouses:
Michelle & George, Kevin & Monica,
Felisia, Justin, Christine, Benjamin,
Dominic and Carmen

Great-Grandson:
Orion

Wake is held at Church of St Mary of the Angels, La Verna Chapel,
5 Bukit Batok East Avenue 2, Singapore 659918
from Sunday 10 February 2019, 3.00pm onwards.

Night prayer on Tuesday 12 February 2019 at 8.00pm.

Funeral Mass on Wednesday 13 February 2019 at 2.30pm
at Church of St Mary of the Angels, thereafter to
Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 4.30pm.

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to

The Family of our Late former Chairman

HOON SOON KWAN ANTHONY
Departed on 7 February 2019

From:

The Management & Staff of

ANDA

ANDA INSURANCE AGENCIES PTE LTD

*"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live," **John 11:25***

Phan Kah Min

Age: 83

Called home to be with the Lord on 6 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Sons:
Rogers Phan Siong Leng
Ivan Phan Siong Hoe
Arthur Phan Siong Wah

Daughters-in-law:
Stephanie Sam Lih Wen
Angeline Lau May Ling
Maria Lee Shiao Yuen

Grandchildren:
Noah, Ezra, Sarah Joy, Genesis,
Luke & Lauren-Mae

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Block 83A Commonwealth Close, Singapore 142083 from Friday 8 February 2019, 12.00pm onwards.

Night service on Sunday 10 February 2019 at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Monday 11 February 2019 at 2.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 3.00pm.

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2nd Anniversary
In Loving Memory Of

LILY BENNETT GOMEZ
nee PEREIRA
Departed on 8 February 2017
In paradise with
Bennett Joachim Gomez
& Donald Peach
Wisdom is the daughter of old age, times flies but memories stay. Pray for us from heaven.
Deeply missed & always remembered by
Sons: Leo & Pio
Daughters: Marie, Pamela, Prema and Anita.
Grandsons: Christopher & Jonathan
Son-in-law: Ray
Granddaughter-in-law: Lindsey

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to
The Family of our Beloved Friend
and Business Partner

MR ONG KHIM HWA

Departed on 7th February 2019

From
The Management & Staff of

Aries Farm Products Pte Ltd
C.I.A.C Investment Pte Ltd
Eco Garden Mall Co Ltd
G Sky Investment Pte Ltd
I Apparel International Group Pte Ltd
Le Urban Investment Pte Ltd
N.G.E Energy Pte Ltd
World Class A (Cambodia) Investment Pte Ltd
Ecogeneration International Pte Ltd

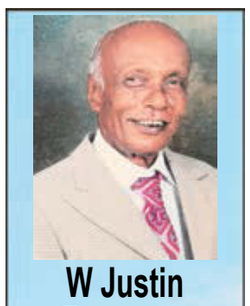
With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to
The Family of Our Late
COO / Director

MR ONG KHIM HWA

Departed on 7th February 2019

From
The Management & Staff of

Aries Fresh Pte Ltd
MP Projects Company
Global Farm Pte Ltd
Beauty Castle Sdn Bhd
Nice Tropics Sdn Bhd
Eastern Jupiter Sdn Bhd
C & C Tropical Mushroom Snacks Sdn Bhd
Pakar Potensi Sdn Bhd
Agridevelopment Co Ltd



W Justin Fernando

Age: 83

Was called home to be with the Lord on 7 February 2019.

Leaving behind:

Wife:
Thilaka Malani Fernando
Children, family and friends.

Wake is held at Block 156 Hougang Street 11 #06-226, Singapore 530156.

Cortege leaves on Saturday 9 February 2019 at 3.15pm for Funeral Mass at Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 24 Highland Road at 3.45pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 5.15pm.

20th Anniversary In Loving Memory of

HUMPHREY OEI

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
the Lord is my life's refuge
of whom should I be afraid?
(Psalm 27:1)

Always loved and remembered,
Mavis

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
Psalm 23:1

Anne Kong Sow Ho

Age: 91

Was called home to the Lord on 7 February 2019.
Dearly missed and forever remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Kok Chit Chai (deceased)

Sons:
Kok Chiang Koon Simon
Kok Cheong Wai Gary

Daughters:
Kok Yin Hup Priscilla
Kok Kum Lan Gina
Kok Chan Hup Jane
Kok Kwan Hup Jean (deceased)
Kok Chai Hup Jess
Kok Tong Hup Audrey

In-laws, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Church of St Stephen, Prayer Room 2, 30 Sallim Road, Singapore 387639.

Nightly prayers will be held at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Monday 11 February 2019 at 9.45am for Funeral Mass at Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 24 Highland Road, Singapore 549115 at 10.30am, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 12.20pm.

A Better Tomorrow, Today.
Embracing innovation, excellence and forward thinking – these are the integral values of our late founders. Their legacy continues here at ONG&ONG, as we spread our wings across Asia and beyond.

Mr Ong Teng Cheong
22 JANUARY 1936 – 8 FEBRUARY 2002

Mrs Ong Siew May
8 AUGUST 1937 – 30 JULY 1999

Ong Teng Cheong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

360 SOLUTION
DESIGN
ENGINEERING
MANAGEMENT

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ONG & ONG group

53rd Anniversary
In Everloving Memory Of

Joseph Tay Buan Heng
Departed: 8 Feb 1966
Remembered by
loved ones

1st Anniversary
In Loving Memory Of

MARY TAN KIA FONG
Departed 8th February 2018
Dearly missed & always remembered by family & loved ones

In Loving Memory since 8 February 2003

Ang Thiang Lye
The dials to the watch stopped the day you left but our memories of you linger through the passage of time.
Deeply missed by your wife, children and grandchildren

"In memoriam" is for the loved ones whom you remember...

"In memoriam" is for the loved ones whom you remember...

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SPORT

18
DAYS BETWEEN RAFAEL RAMAZOTTI SIGNING FOR HOUGANG AND MEXICO'S JUAREZ C9

GUARDIOLA EXPECTS TWISTS IN TITLE RACE

Gabriel Jesus getting his head to the ball ahead of Everton's Kurt Zouma and Jordan Pickford, sealing Manchester City's 2-0 win on Wednesday, and top spot in the Premier League. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

City boss wary despite return to the top as Liverpool have match in hand and his team may still drop points in run-in

LONDON • While Manchester City are back on top of the Premier League – at least until Saturday – manager Pep Guardiola is not expecting anything like a repeat of last season's procession to the title.

After a 2-0 win at Everton on Wednesday, courtesy of strikes from Aymeric Laporte and Gabriel Jesus, City are ahead of Liverpool on goal difference.

Last term, City won the title by 19 points and such was their lead during the latter stages that it was a case of when, not if, they would be crowned champions.

Yet with Jurgen Klopp's challengers having a game in hand and Tottenham just five points behind the front runners, Guardiola knows that their return to the pinnacle of English football's top flight for the first time since Dec 8 means little in the grand scheme of things.

The City manager told reporters: "We are leaders, but 12 games to play, a lot of games.

"We are going to drop points, hopefully less than the other teams. I don't think any team will win all 12 games.

"We have (played) one more game than Liverpool and, if they win (their game in hand), we are not top.

"But being top is much better. Liverpool has to play this game. I don't think too much about that but, four or five days ago, we could have been seven points behind, it is a lesson to never give up.

"Goodison Park, 2-0, we have to be happy. In terms of consistency, we didn't concede one shot on target. To score in the last minute of the first half helped us a lot.

"We are not the tallest team in the world so we don't expect to score from set pieces, but (assistant coach) Mikel Arteta works a lot on them. I am so satisfied."

Guardiola's men are two-thirds through a testing week and, having secured maximum points from their previous two league matches, they will now seek to cap an impressive run against Chelsea at the Etihad on Sunday.

There will, however, be little respite for City with the games coming in thick and fast.

After this weekend, the champions have to play four more times before the end of this month, including the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at Schalke, and Guardiola admitted the fixture congestion "demands a lot of stress".

But, for now, the 48-year-old is just delighted with the way City regained the initiative in the title race despite their damaging loss at Newcastle last week.

He said: "We have a game every three days for three months. I don't know how far we will get, maybe we will die on the road, but we are trying. We have an incredible test on Sunday against Chelsea."

The Spaniard also cranked up the pressure on the Reds by indulging in mind games and suggested that cross-town rivals Manchester United were capable of doing them a favour.

He added: "Liverpool have to go to Old Trafford (on Feb 24)."

That Sunday, City will be at Wembley to face the Blues in the League Cup final. The Cup holders remain the only English team capable of securing an unprecedented quadruple this season.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

ONE MATCH AT A TIME

Being top is much better. Liverpool has to play this game. I don't think too much about that but, four or five days ago, we could have been seven points behind.

PEP GUARDIOLA, Man City manager, on his team's return to the top while acknowledging the Reds' game in hand.

HOW CITY RECLAIMED TOP SPOT IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE

JAN 19: -7

Liverpool's 4-3 win over Crystal Palace puts them seven points ahead of Manchester City, the biggest lead they would hold over the champions.

FEB 4: -3

West Ham manager Manuel Pellegrini does his old team a favour when his side hold Liverpool to a 1-1 draw, giving City the chance to go top again.

FEB 6: 0

City's 2-0 win at Goodison Park, their second straight in the league, propels them to the top on goal difference, ending the Reds' 10-week stay at the summit, albeit temporarily.

Body from Sala's plane sent to Britain for identification

LONDON • Investigators recovered a body from the wreckage of a plane carrying Argentinian footballer Emiliano Sala in the English Channel on Wednesday.

The body was yesterday transported to Britain for identification, which will be done by the coroner in the county of Dorset. According to news website WalesOnline, there is "no definitive timescale on this".

Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) said that it was ending the operation to bring the crashed plane to the surface due to bad weather.

The plane was flying the 28-year-old from Nantes to Cardiff when it disappeared near the Channel island of Guernsey on Jan 21, along with 59-year-old pilot David Ibbotson.

Sala had signed for Cardiff just two days earlier for a club-record fee of £15 million (S$26.3 million).

His disappearance prompted outpourings of grief across the sporting world and, after local search operations were suspended, a shipwreck hunter hired by Sala's family, with funds donated by fellow footballers, found the wreckage on Sunday.

The AAIB, who then took over the operation, said on Wednesday: "In challenging conditions, the body previously seen amid the wreckage was successfully recovered.

"The operation was carried out in as dignified a way as possible and the families were kept informed of progress.

"The weather forecast is poor for the foreseeable future and so the difficult decision was taken to bring the overall operation to a close."

It added video footage captured by a remotely operated vehicle is expected to "provide valuable evidence for our safety investigation".

The AAIB intends to publish an interim report on the accident later this month.

But, while Cardiff continue to reel from the tragedy, Nantes have consulted lawyers to explore legal options to ensure Cardiff pay the transfer fee for Sala.

The Bluebirds are understood to have received a legal letter from the French club demanding payment within 10 days of a sum believed to be about £5 million after they did not respond to an e-mail request.

That would represent the first instalment of the fee agreed between both clubs.

Cardiff's first payment was due on Jan 26 – seven days after completing the signing – and, after it had not been received last week, Nantes took action.

With the club insisting they are not ready to deal with financial matters before a body has been found and a funeral taken place, the dispute is likely to continue.

They are believed to have obtained insurance for Sala on completing his signing before confirming their liability for the transfer fee by lodging his registration with the Football Association of Wales on the day of his flight.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE TIMES, LONDON

Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch, who recovered an unidentified body on Wednesday, said that it was ending the operation to bring the crashed plane to the surface due to bad weather. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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CURIOUS CASE OF RAMAZOTTI

Brazilian striker joins Hougang, quits and reappears as new Mexican club signing

Wang Meng Meng

Hougang United are seeking compensation from Rafael Ramazotti and are prepared to take their case all the way to world governing body Fifa. TNP FILE PHOTO

He was meant to form what could potentially be the most lethal strike partnership in the upcoming Singapore Premier League season.

But, 18 days after joining Hougang United on Jan 10, Rafael Ramazotti abruptly quit the club.

The Brazilian striker later resurfaced on Jan 28 when he was unveiled as the new signing of FC Juarez, a club in Mexico's second-tier Liga MX.

The Cheetahs are now prepared to take their case all the way to world governing body Fifa.

Yesterday, Hougang presented documents to prove that the 30-year-old had signed for the club and they are entitled to compensation.

Matthew Tay, general manager of the Cheetahs, said: "We have submitted paperwork to the FAS (Football Association of Singapore) to show that the player is legitimately contracted to Hougang.

"This matter is likely to go to Fifa (for resolution)."

Aloysius Vetha, the FAS' head of the competitions division, said: "We are working closely with Hougang United FC on the case and will refer it to the Fifa Players' Status Committee once the facts of the case have been ascertained."

According to Tay, Ramazotti arrived in Singapore on Jan 10 to sign a two-year deal with the team, but things took a drastic turn quickly.

"On Jan 21, he initiated the termination of his contract. He said he wanted to be with his family. We accepted his resignation but with compensation," said Tay.

He declined to reveal how much compensation Hougang are seeking from the Brazilian.

However, according to Tay, Ramazotti vacated the apartment the club had rented for him on Jan 27 without paying compensation to the club.

A day later, Juarez announced the signing of Ramazotti on their website, which also posted a picture of the 1.93m striker in the team's green jersey.

Juarez have not responded to queries from The Straits Times.

Formerly with Bruneian side DPMM, Ramazotti boasts a prolific scoring record in Singapore football.

He was the league's top scorer in 2015 (21 goals) and 2016 (20 goals) before ending his time in DPMM colours in 2017 with 55 goals in 71 games.

Last year, he played for Malaysia Super League side PKNS FC.

Crucially, Tay revealed that Hougang are still holding on to the player's International Transfer Certificate, a document mandatory in the registration of a player.

This means that Ramazotti is ineligible to play for the Mexican club.

Cheetahs coach Clement Teo, who had wanted to pair Ramazotti with clinical Croatian striker Stipe Plazibat to spearhead Hougang's campaign, is dismayed by Ramazotti turning his back on the club.

He lamented: "It's very heartbreaking for me to see this happen, but we got to move on. We are still looking for a replacement foreign signing.

"The team is disappointed, but morale among the players is very good.

"They know that no one is indispensable and they all want to play a part for the team."

meng@sph.com.sg

Malcom shines in absence of other Barca stars

BARCELONA • Malcom has struggled for game time at Barcelona since his €42 million (S$64.6 million) move from Bordeaux last July as he finds himself behind Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez, Ousmane Dembele, and Philippe Coutinho in the pecking order.

But, with Messi only fit enough to come on as a substitute, Dembele missing through injury, and Coutinho struggling badly for form, Barca coach Ernesto Valverde decided to give the Brazilian winger a rare start in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg against Real Madrid at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

And the 21-year-old turned out to be Barca's liveliest player, curling home the equaliser in the 57th minute after Lucas Vazquez had fired Real ahead in the sixth minute.

Malcom has made just one start in the LaLiga this season, although he has featured in all five Copa del Rey matches. Despite finding regular football hard to come by at Barca, he insisted that patience is the key.

"I've always been calm, just like when I arrived. I have friends who give me confidence, I have family, agents all fighting for me and also my teammates. I have a lot of support," he said. "I have not played much recently, but I'm more confident. I will work hard to improve and play a little more."

When the two teams last met in October, Real were thrashed 5-1 by Barca at the Nou Camp, bringing an end to Julen Lopetegui's spell.

Wednesday's performance was a distinct improvement and showed just how far Santiago Solari's side have come in a little over three months. The Argentinian was pleased with his team's performance and thought they might have snatched a victory.

"It's hard to talk about justice in football. We had chances to score in the first and second half, but what will stick with me is that it was a precise game, very entertaining," he said.

"Both sides have the chance to go through," added Real goalkeeper Keylor Navas, who made good saves from Suarez and Malcom.

"It was a good game. Everyone in the team worked hard when we needed to and we played well too."

The second leg will take place at the Santiago Bernabeu on Feb 27.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Qatar's Asian Cup heroes rewarded with lavish gifts

DOHA • These are heady times for the Qatar national football team.

On the back of winning their first Asian Cup last Friday, Felix Sanchez's men have risen 38 places to 55th in the latest Fifa world rankings released yesterday.

Not only are Qatar enjoying their highest position in 26 years, they are now ahead of Mohamed Salah's Egypt and Africa Cup of Nations champions Cameroon.

The team returned home to a rapturous welcome from tens of thousands of ecstatic fans, including Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who has reportedly rewarded the footballers handsomely for bringing joy to the people at a time of simmering political tension in the Gulf.

Qataris did not travel to the United Arab Emirates, which hosted the Cup, as the country is currently under a blockade led by its neighbours, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who have accused Doha of supporting terrorism – a charge it has denied.

According to an article published on Fox Sports Asia's website, which cited Iranian media reports and a now-deleted tweet by Iranian football writer Sina Saemian, Al Thani has lavished gifts on every player.

They reportedly included a London apartment, a £2 million (S$3.5 million) cash reward, a monthly salary for the rest of their lives, a Lexus car and a luncheon hosted at his royal residence.

Young fans taking photos with Qatar forward and 2019 Asian Cup Most Valuable Player Almoez Ali at Doha International airport, as Qataris welcome home their football heroes over the weekend. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

While some have questioned the country's recent triumph, claiming it has come out of the blue, former Barcelona great Xavi Hernandez believes the Cup win was deserved as the Qatar Football Association (QFA) had kept the 2022 World Cup hosts "on the right track".

The former Spain midfielder, who now plies his trade in Qatar as Al Sadd's captain, told TV channel Al Kass Sport: "Now you see the results produced by the Qatari team. It is a great team now. I am proud to work with these young players.

"We must remember that the QFA has been preparing this team for years to win this title.

"The Aspire Academy project is the idea of Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and the idea is now achieving great success. What Aspire has done is to prepare a platform for the emergence of players that we currently see on the pitch."

Thirteen out of Qatar's 22-strong Cup squad had links with Aspire, and Xavi has been frequently seen helping out at the academy when he is not tied up with his club commitments. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SportsWorld

West Ham looking into Salah abuse video

LONDON • West Ham have launched an investigation after social media footage emerged of abuse directed at Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah during the 1-1 Premier League draw at the London Stadium on Monday.

The Egypt international was filmed on a smartphone from a section of home supporters as he was taking a corner. The clip contained audible expletives directed at him, including comments against his religion.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Murray's late brace sees Brighton through

LONDON • Substitute Glenn Murray scored twice in extra-time as Brighton saw off Championship side West Brom 3-1 in an FA Cup fourth-round replay at the Hawthorns on Wednesday.

The Premier League side had faced elimination when Kyle Bartley gave West Brom the lead in the 78th minute, but Florin Andone levelled with eight minutes left before Murray took centre stage to earn Brighton a fifth-round home tie against Derby County.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Re-elected Ceferin hints at new events

ROME • Aleksander Ceferin was re-elected unopposed yesterday as president of European football's governing body Uefa, promising an overhaul of club competitions but reaffirming there would be no Super League on his watch.

The Slovenian did not give details of how the new-look tournaments, to be introduced from 2024, would work, but he stressed that teams would qualify via results rather than by invitation. REUTERS

Nitties hits 9 birdies to equal world mark

MELBOURNE • Australia's James Nitties carved out a slice of golfing history at the Vic Open yesterday when he equalled the world record of nine straight birdies set by Mark Calcavecchia in 2009.

Starting from the 10th hole at 13th Beach Golf Club, the 36-year-old made his remarkable run from the par-four 15th through to the par-five fifth at the European Tour co-sanctioned event.

Nitties finished with an eight-under 64 for a share of second place, two strokes behind leader Nick Flanagan.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOTTERY

TOTO Thu, 7 Feb 2019 Draw No. 3447/2019

Group 1 Prize $3,095,780

Winning Numbers						Add. No.
05	07	09	11	35	49	31

Prize Group	Share Amount	No. of Winning Shares
Group 1	$1,547,890	2
Group 2	$30,928	12
Group 3	$1,096	233
Group 4	$316	441
Group 5	$50	12,999
Group 6	$25	12,930
Group 7	$10	202,210

Group 1 prize and total share amount for Group 1 may differ due to rounding.

Next Draw Mon, 11 Feb 2019, 6.30pm Draw No. 3448/2019

Group 1 Prize $1,000,000 est.

Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Fri, 8 Feb 2019				
A League	Brisbane Roar	Sydney FC	4.50pm	LW
Sat, 9 Feb 2019				
German League	Mainz	Leverkusen	3.30am	LW*
Italian League	Chievo	Roma	3.30am	LW*
English League Champ	Aston Villa	Sheffield Utd	3.45am	LW*
Spanish League	Valladolid	Villarreal	4.00am	LW*

LW* : Telecast not available at Livewire(Singapore Pools)
Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.
LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)
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SPORT

MILWAUKEE FIRST TEAM TO REACH 40 WINS

Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo dunking his way to a superb 43 points in the rout of the Washington Wizards on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

MVP contender Antetokounmpo wants the Bucks to improve and become 'a great team'

MILWAUKEE • Giannis Antetokounmpo underscored his Most Valuable Player credentials on Wednesday with a scintillating 43-point display as the Milwaukee Bucks bagged their 40th win of the season with a 148-129 rout of the Washington Wizards.

The "Greek Freak" starred in the dominant offensive display by the Bucks, who now own the best record in the National Basketball Association (NBA) with 40 wins against 13 defeats.

But, despite their fifth straight win after scoring 50 points in the first quarter against a Wizards team who struggled to contain the home side, with six Bucks players making double figures, Antetokounmpo was still not satisfied.

He told reporters that while Mike Budenholzer's players were already "a good team", they still had some way to go to becoming "a great team".

He said: "Even though we scored a lot, we were sloppy. Defensively, we have to pick it up a little bit because that's not the face we want to show."

That competitive drive partly explains why Antetokounmpo is the leading vote-getter in the East ahead of the All-Star game, featuring Team Giannis against Team LeBron (James) on Feb 17.

It was the latest in a series of superb performances this season by the three-time All-Star, who has thrust himself firmly into the conversation for MVP honours in recent weeks.

"Just tried to be aggressive coming into the game, trying to make plays for my teammates," the 24-year-old, who made 17 of 21 attempts and drained three out of three from beyond the arc, said.

Attributing his stellar display to a relaxed approach, he added: "I just tried not to think about it and to just shoot the ball. That's what my team told me to do and that's what I'm going to keep on doing."

The forward also reserved praise for teammate Eric Bledsoe, who posted 22 points along with 11 assists and six rebounds.

He said of the guard: "He's been amazing all year. He came in with a defensive mindset. He was in the passing lanes. He made tough shots. He gave us the extra energy and we were able to close the game."

The reason for Antetokounmpo's tempered optimism despite the Bucks becoming the first team to reach the 40-win mark can be put down to the bold trades the Philadelphia 76ers have made this term.

While the Sixers are fifth in the East, 6½ games behind, they now have a genuine claim to the league's most potent line-up outside of the two-time defending champions Golden State Warriors after acquiring Tobias Harris on Wednesday.

The forward now joins J.J. Redick, Jimmy Butler and Antetokounmpo's All-Star teammates Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons.

In his second trade this season for a player who can become a free agent in July, Philadelphia general manager Elton Brand surrendered two future first-round picks and two second-round picks in a six-player deal, with the obvious headliner being Harris.

"We are in a unique position to contend now, and this trade positions us well for the post-season," he said in a statement.

The Sixers' two-fold challenge will be to establish a chemistry among their new five-man core in the 28 games left before the playoffs and then re-signing Harris and Butler this summer after making two of this season's biggest trades to get them.

Harris emerged as an All-Star contender for the Los Angeles Clippers this season, averaging 20.9 points and 7.9 rebounds a game. His move to Philadelphia gives the Sixers another much-needed shooter (.496 from the field) alongside Redick.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, NYTIMES

50

Points Milwaukee scored in the first quarter against Washington, only the second team since 1990 to do so, after Golden State managed a 51-point feat against Denver last month.

Horner urges Liberty to set vision for F1's future

LONDON • Formula One owners Liberty Media have underestimated the task of running the sport and must be firm in setting out a vision for the future, says Red Bull team boss Christian Horner.

Speaking to reporters before this season's cars break cover next week, he was also scathing of technical changes he said had been expensive to implement but would change little on the track.

The agreements between teams, the rights holders and the governing body expire at the end of next year and American-based Liberty, who took control two years ago, want a closer racing experience and a more level playing field.

That includes a budget cap and distributing revenues more equally, as well as technical changes so that cars can follow at close quarters and overtake more easily.

The details have yet to be defined, however, with resistance from wealthy teams, who have historically enjoyed special privileges.

Horner said of Liberty's initial approach to the sport: "They probably thought there was some very low hanging fruit there and it's proved an awful lot harder than they perhaps thought.

"You can window dress and promote a movie as much as you like but, if the movie has not got the substance and isn't an exciting movie, people won't watch it."

While Liberty have taken positive steps in areas such as e-sports, digital platforms and promotion, Horner called on them to set out a clear post-2020 blueprint.

He added: "As the owner of the sport, they need to take a position of, 'This is what we want F1 to be, here's the set of regulations and the financials, and go with it'."

Promoters representing a majority of the tracks on the calendar last week voiced concern about Liberty's handling of the sport.

F1 cars will have wider and simpler front wings this term, but he was sceptical about how the changes would improve the racing.

"They've cherry-picked something in isolation off a future concept for 2021 and rushed it through onto the current car. There's no silver bullet," he said.

"It has to be everything working in harmony with everything else. Just taking the front wing and saying that will make racing better, it's quite a naive and expensive approach."

However, F1's chief executive Chase Carey has hit back in his row with promoters, claiming their gripes were "not going to change what we are doing".

The American, who is understood to have been upset by the criticism, said: "It's part of life, you are going to find a bunch of people who have something to complain about and are going to make noise."

REUTERS, THE GUARDIAN

WRONG APPROACH

You can window dress and promote a movie as much as you like but, if the movie has not got the substance and isn't an exciting movie, people won't watch it.

CHRISTIAN HORNER, Red Bull team boss.

Golf chiefs clarify new caddie rule

LOS ANGELES • Golf chiefs on Wednesday clarified new rules on caddie alignment following separate incidents at recent events which saw two players controversially hit with stroke penalties.

China's Li Haotong got a two-shot penalty at the Dubai Desert Classic while Denny McCarthy received an identical sanction at the Phoenix Open in Arizona.

Both incidents arose from confusion over the application of Rule 10.2b(4), which governs where a caddie may stand when a player is making a stroke.

The new rule, introduced this season, bars caddies from standing behind a golfer once the player has begun to address his ball.

Although The R&A later said Li was correctly sanctioned in line with the rules, McCarthy's penalty was revoked after tournament officials said other players had not been punished for the same offence.

The R&A and the United States Golf Association (USGA) sought to clarify and said that if a player backs away from taking a stance, he was not now "considered to have begun a stance for the stroke".

"Therefore, a player can now back away from his or her stance anywhere on the course and avoid a breach of Rule 10.2b(4) if the caddie had been standing in a location behind the ball," a statement said.

Players would also be punished only if a caddie was "deliberately" aware that a player was entering a stance to take a stroke and was standing "on or close" to the line of play behind the ball.

"Experience has taught us that introducing a new rule requires us to balance patience with a willingness to act quickly when necessary," Thomas Pagel, the USGA's senior managing director of governance, said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL
ABL HK Eastern v Alab Pilipinas (StarHub Ch202, 8.30pm).

CRICKET
2nd T20 Int'l NZ v India (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 2pm).

FOOTBALL
Spanish LaLiga Valladolid v Villarreal (StarHub Ch213, Tomorrow, 3.55am).

GOLF
European Tour Vic Open: Day 2 (StarHub Ch204, noon).

TOMORROW

BASKETBALL
ABL Mono Vampire v CLS Knights (StarHub Ch202, 4pm).

FOOTBALL
English Premier League Fulham v Man Utd (8.30pm), Liverpool v Bournemouth (11pm), Brighton v Burnley (Sunday, 1.30am) – Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, Huddersfield v Arsenal (Ch103 & Ch 228), Southampton v Cardiff (Ch104 & Ch229), Watford vs Everton (Ch105 & Ch230), Palace vs West Ham (Ch106 & Ch231) – 10.50pm
Spanish LaLiga Atletico v Real Madrid (11.10pm), Espanyol vs Rayo (Sunday, 1.30am) – StarHub Ch213

GOLF
European Tour Vic Open: Day 3 (StarHub Ch204, 11am).

For latest updates, go to singteltv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

life

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A hawker centre meal is something I look forward to whenever I return from a work trip. The familiar feeling of home, the noise, smell and tastes can never be replicated elsewhere.

Ivan Teo, 40

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Wearing her wedding dress again – and again

Ms Lexy Leong had her wedding gown (above) turned into a cocktail dress (left). The gown was shortened and its sides taken in to become a knee-length pencil skirt. The excess material from the train was turned into a detachable straight-cut front flap to hide the original sweetheart neckline.
PHOTOS: JASMINE CHOONG, COURTESY OF LEXY LEONG

Some brides are repurposing their wedding outfits for everyday occasions

Michelle Ng

There are still eight months to go before Ms Lexy Leong and her husband celebrate their first-year wedding anniversary, but she already has her outfit picked out for the occasion.

The 27-year-old, who manages a creative writing centre, plans to wear the white wedding dress that she walked down the aisle in – except it has been turned into a cocktail dress, minus the lacy frills and train, to make it more appropriate for date nights.

She had the outfit altered after her wedding day.

Originally a full-length gown in a trumpet silhouette, it has been shortened and its sides taken in to become a knee-length pencil skirt.

The excess material from the train was turned into a detachable straight-cut front flap to hide the original sweetheart neckline for a more modern look.

While re-wearing a wedding dress is not a standard practice in Singapore, there is a small but growing group of brides like Ms Leong who are repurposing their wedding dresses for everyday occasions, bridal shop owners tell The Straits Times.

Ms Leong, who is married to 29-year-old Muhd Shazwan, an assistant front-office manager at a hotel, did not know this was an option until her dressmaker told her.

Early last year, she approached bespoke bridal boutique Alerisa at Oxley Tower in Tanjong Pagar to custom-make a dress that would reflect both her and her husband's cultures.

When the shop owner, Ms Sheryl Ong, 35, suggested designing a dress that can be repurposed into a semi-formal outfit after the big day, Ms Leong was sold on the idea.

"It's really meaningful to have a wedding dress, which represents so much to me, that I can wear again and again," she says.

She also had a tulle cheongsam "pullover" and a full-length glitter cape custom-made, to layer on top of the wedding gown to create different looks without having to go through multiple outfit changes that many brides do.

She plans to keep these two pieces as they are.

She paid $2,500 for the three pieces and another $300 to alter the gown.

"The process of cutting and transforming my wedding dress into a new piece feels like the start of a new chapter in life for me," she says.

Although custom-making a wedding dress is common these days, only a handful of bridal boutiques here offer post-wedding repurposing services.

Ms Ong decided to offer the service as she feels wearing the dress just once is too wasteful. Half of her clients buy the dresses from her, while the rest rent.

To ensure that her pieces can be easily converted, Ms Ong uses a low-shine crepe satin material that is suitable for a wedding dress, but will not look out of place in a less elaborate setting.

She avoids tulle and chiffon – the more commonly used fabrics in wedding dresses – as they do not work as well in casual outfits.

Her trick when designing the dress is to work backwards by suggesting that the bride think about how she wants the repurposed piece to look like. From there, Ms Ong will figure out how to make it into a wedding gown.

"When repurposing, I'm doing only minor alterations and not changing the silhouette, so it's important to think about the shape of the dress from the beginning," she says.

She has repurposed two gowns so far since she started her business in November 2017.

Some brides-to-be have also expressed interest in converting their gowns.

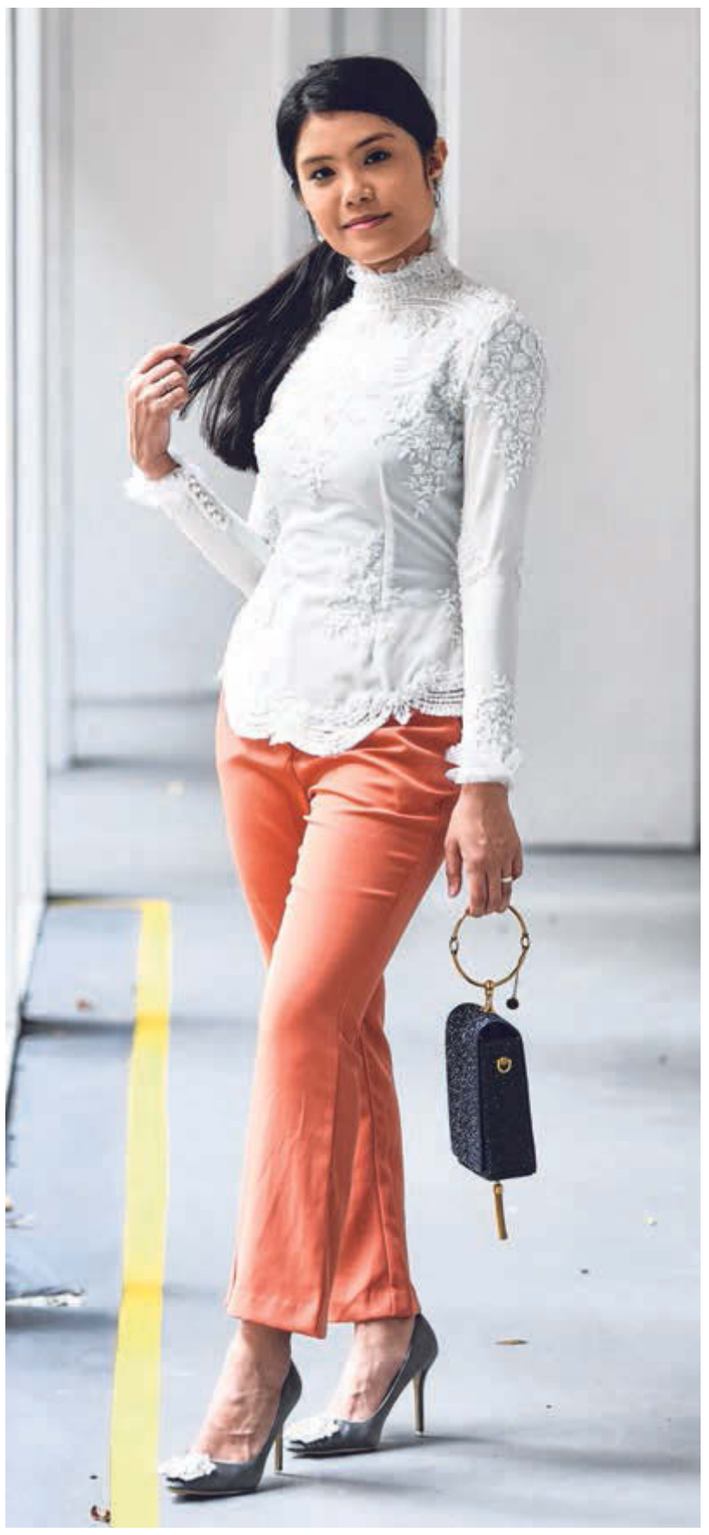
Her prices for a bespoke gown, which takes four to six months to complete, start at $2,000. Repurposing can be done in a week for an additional $300 to $500.

Another bridal boutique, Caramel & Co at Oxley BizHub in Tai Seng, has been offering a complimentary repurposing service with every bespoke gown purchase since the business launched its bespoke bridal range in 2011.

But owner Mel Chen, 35, says she has so far repurposed only 30 to 40 gowns despite making close to 60 gowns every year.

> **Brides these days are more practical, they don't want to just buy and keep the dress, which is not (milking value) out of the money spent.**
>
> **MS MEL CHEN,** owner of bridal boutique, Caramel & Co at Oxley BizHub in Tai Seng, which offers a complimentary repurposing service with every bespoke gown purchase

CONTINUED on D2



Associate editor Syazana Hishamuddin custom-made a pair of yellow palazzo pants and drape top (above) out of traditional Malay songket fabric for her wedding reception. She pairs her palazzo pants with tops for Hari Raya visiting. PHOTOS: JONATHAN CHOO, COURTESY OF SYAZANA HISHAMUDDIN

Civil servant Fatin Hazirah had a two-piece kebaya (above) custom-made for her engagement in November 2017. She has since worn the pieces separately, such as pairing the top with a bold colour bottom (left). PHOTOS: JASMINE CHOONG, COURTESY OF FATIN HAZIRAH

Separates give gowns more mileage

FROM D1

This is partly because she does not impose a deadline for the bride to repurpose the dress.

She had a customer who took her gown to Ms Chen five years later.

But, she adds, she has seen a growing interest and uptake in brides wanting to convert their dresses sooner rather than later, citing wedding inspiration boards on Pinterest as the main driving factor.

Besides simple alteration such as shortening and detaching into separates, Caramel & Co also offers redyeing. Blush and blue tones are the most popular colours.

"Brides these days are more practical, they don't want to just buy and keep the dress, which is not (milking value) out of the money spent," Ms Chen says.

A bespoke gown from Caramel & Co starts at $4,000, taking a minimum of six months to complete. Repurposing, including re-dyeing, takes one to two weeks.

Another way some bridal boutiques are ensuring their clients get more mileage out of their dresses is by making two separate pieces – top and bottom – that can be worn together or each on its own.

Started in October 2017, Amerylis by Suha Haris is a home-based bridal business that has made a number of two-piece wedding outfits.

Owner Amerylis Suha, 25, takes one to two orders a month and has made over 20 bespoke outfits. Of these, at least eight have been repurposed and restyled into more casual outfits.

One of the brides who did so is civil servant Fatin Hazirah, 25, who had a Victorian-inspired white kebaya custom-made for her engagement in November 2017.

Her stretchy satin top has a slight turtleneck with a tulle gathering at the hem of the sleeves, complete with intricate beadwork that continues on the draped full-length skirt. On her engagement day, she wore the $1,200 outfit with the top tucked in but has since worn the pieces separately.

The fashionista, who says her personal style is "quite dressy", has worn the top five times and the skirt on twice the number of occasions – often pairing the pieces with a statement colour such as maroon.

"People are quite shocked when I tell them it's the same top I wore during my engagement because they don't recognise it at all," she says.

Other more adventurous brides are even ditching the traditional white dress to incorporate bolder colours into their outfits.

Magazine associate editor Syazana Hishamuddin, 24, picked out a sunshine-yellow traditional Malay songket fabric and had a three-piece outfit made by Amerylis by Suha Haris that cost $1,400. It was her full-day outfit for her second-day wedding reception in October 2017.

Her favourite is the modern palazzo pants, which she has worn at least thrice for Hari Raya visiting. The other two pieces are a matching drape bustier and a navy-blue tulle inner piece, which she wears to dressier events such as dinners and the theatre.

A bespoke outfit from Amerylis by Suha Haris starts at $1,200 and takes three months to complete. Clients who provide their own material pay only for the design and tailoring, which starts at $800.

"I've always been very interested in sustainable fashion and to be able to pick apart a wedding outfit I made and dress it up differently is quite special to me," says Ms Suha.

ngmich@sph.com.sg

Vegan fashion eyes pineapple leaves and orange fibre

Outfits on show at the Vegan Fashion Week at the California Market Centre last week. PHOTO: NYTIMES

LOS ANGELES • Mena Suvari, the actress known for both American Woman (2018) and American Beauty (1999), was in the front row at last week's first Vegan Fashion Week (VFW) at the California Market Centre, wearing a black textured patent-something cap with matching jacket and pants by Enda, along with "leather" shoes by a brand that bore the label Cult of Coquette.

Suvari, 39, has been vegan for the past two years, and it quickly dawned on her that this commitment involves not just food, but also clothes.

She has started an Instagram account devoted to the topic of vegan fashion and said she recently met a manufacturer and plans to start designing herself.

There were 54 vegan companies represented at the weekend-long event, which was organised by Ms Emmanuelle Rienda, 36, a veteran of the fashion industry.

"I was promoting fast fashion, the use of animal products and selling a very large amount of leather goods to department stores," Ms Rienda said of her past life. She hopes to bring VFW to different cities.

The offerings of a company called Enda included faux shearling made with a multilayered acrylic fleece and a machine-washable wool-free tweed made in Italy. The brand's founder, Ran Enda, 36, used to work at Ralph Lauren. "We used leather and fur a lot and I was struggling because it really contradicted what I believed in," she said.

Many of the exhibitors started their lines in the past few years. But Ms Rebecca Mink, a former fashion stylist, began her label, Mink, in 2000.

In addition to creating small collections of fancy pumps and heels, she designs custom boots for vegan celebrities including singer Miley Cyrus: "snakeskin" ones for a Saturday Night Live appearance and shoes with gold cross heels for the Met Gala.

Ms Mink, 48, has noticed strong vegan interest from people half her age. "The younger generation wants to know where and how their products are being made," she said.

But how do vegan brands show consumers that they are more than just second-rate, er, copycats of the animal-skin mainstream?

"In the past, we were calling it faux leather, but we don't want to be faux or fake anything now," said Ms Silvia Gallo, 41, president of Jeane & Jax, a luxury vegan handbag company in Montreal. "When people look at our purses, they can't tell if they are leather or not."

After clearing the bar of veganism, which sometime involves synthetic fibres like polyester that take a lot of energy to create and do not decompose easily, many companies are now turning to the concept of being easy on the environment.

New Rock, a footwear brand, will soon begin producing a new batch of shoes made with Pinatex, a sustainably sourced pineapple leaf leather alternative, and plans to experiment with coconut fibres for inner soles. "This will make us much more ecological," said Mr Nicolas Ortuno, 40, a worldwide sales manager at the company's headquarters in Yecla, Spain.

At VFW, models strutted down the runway wearing Altiir's flashy gold Pinatex biker jackets. Mink displayed sneakers made of corn plastic soles and there was ample talk about a much-coveted material called Frumat.

Matea Benedetti, 43, a designer from Ljubljana, Slovenia, was one of the few on site already using the material, which is made from apple-industry waste. Her red and white apple leather gown with a train elicited a roar of applause from the crowd as it sailed down the catwalk.

Next, Benedetti is hoping to experiment with orange fibre, a supple new leather alternative set to hit the market soon.

"I'm waiting for when it will be ready," she said, adding that she also has her eye on coffee-ground leather sourced from Asia. NYTIMES

That old suit? It's new again

Tailored suits have never gone out of style, and the early 2010s saw a wave of young tailors sprouting in Singapore

Gordon Ng

A paradigm shift in spending these days has made menswear the fashion industry's fastest growing segment.

Market research firm Euromonitor was quoted as forecasting men's lines to outperform women's between 2017 and 2022, with sales expanding by a compound annual growth rate of 2 per cent.

This increased attention inevitably means both men's and women's wear can only get more interesting.

We live in the age of street wear. Urban subcultures and casual clothing have become the day-to-day for the millennial generation – many of whom are in jobs significantly different from their parents.

The start-up culture and Silicon Valley's influence in changing workplace dress codes mean smart casual now rules the day. Formal wear, therefore, is almost an anachronistic uniform of times past.

But as we all know, fashion trends are cyclical so while casual wear is trending, tailoring is now slowly regaining its place in the fashion zeitgeist after years of being deemed demode.

As the fashion world goes on accelerating at an already breakneck pace of fast fashion and cheap mass production, tailoring offers a more personal and timeless respite from trend chasing.

Ms Sheryl Yeo, 28, the tailor and director behind custom clothier 3Eighth, wants to open up the world of suiting to a wider audience – women, especially.

Consumers, she says, are looking at "slow-fashion options" to get "unique styling and more personalised services".

Mr Javin They, 30, founder of Common Suits, agrees.

He points out that tailoring is after all, "to correct a person's proportions and to bring out most flattering ratios".

These ratios are the raison d'etre of tailoring. Overly wide or narrow shoulders, paunches, hunches – they can all be optically "fixed" through precise tailoring.

It is an attractive feature that is almost impossible to achieve from off-the-rack fashion.

But it is not without its price. Bespoke and made to measure suiting is often an expensive process, with a production lead time of weeks, with numerous fittings in between.

Most tailors in Singapore use a range of lightweight fabrics and construction, chosen for their climate appropriateness.

One such brand that offers its services by appointment only is Son Of A Gan Bespoke.

Mr Dave Gan, 31, who is part of the team there, said that such exclusivity "arouses interest and curiosity". This leads, in turn, to people who explore the worlds of bespoke and made-to-measure.

The peculiar thing about tailoring is that while it may have been quieted in the face of contemporary tastes, it has never truly gone out of style.

It is persistent and one of the few examples of timelessness in fashion, its heritage and traditions mostly unchanged.

In Singapore, this manifested itself as a wave of new and younger tailors which sprouted in the early years after 2010.

These brands and labels rode a wave of popularity driven at the time by photographs of the sartorial peacocks in Milan's Pitti Uomo fashion trade show.

They credit the current resurgence to "the proliferation of the Internet and social media", citing a glut of "professionally shot pictures and the popularity of movies and television series such as Peaky Blinders and Kingsman".

With such exposure, no wonder consumers are interested and more open to the idea of exploring their fashion tastes with tailoring as a canvas.

Mr Gan has noticed that customers are now "less conservative and more open to bolder and flamboyant colours and fabric choices".

Ms Yeo says she serves what she calls "alt-women", the under-represented female customer who shies away from glitz and glamour and who might prefer time-tested sartorial inclinations.

A crucial strength of tailoring, it seems, is its inherent inclusivity for all types – born out of its personal and customised nature.

For all its heritage and tradition, however, the craft and business of tailored clothes remains subject to change and the need to evolve.

Common Suits has combined old and new in its production process: creating a locally-based production team to maintain full creative and quality control, as well as acquiring and using a 3D scanner to make the all important work of taking and recording physical measurements faster, more accurate and consistent.

Big luxury brands are already using similar technology, like interactive mirrors at select Burberry boutiques that conjure accompanying runway footage using RFID technology on clothing tags.

On the ground at smaller businesses, however, the technology is far too nascent and expensive to be feasibly incorporated.

Ms Yeo says that many parts of the business are kept extremely manual, requiring a lot of human input and perception.

These dualities keep the art and craft of tailoring interesting: old and new, uniform and individual. Perhaps that is why it resists fashion, and lives more firmly as a timeless style made especially alluring because it is no longer a necessary conformity.

The freedom to decide whether tailoring suits you has thus made this style of dressing, a choice and not an obligation.

stlife@sph.com.sg

A Berluti outfit at the men's Fall/Winter 2019/2020 collection fashion show in Paris last month. Suits will never go out of fashion. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NY Fashion Week: Men's takes a beating

NEW YORK • Barely three years after New York Fashion Week: Men's made its debut as a stand-alone celebration of all things sartorial and male, the bold experiment has fizzled.

Inaugurated in 2015 as a move by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) to showcase New York designers and align their schedules with the nearly month-long schedule of menswear shows in Paris, London and Milan, the men's week in New York quickly established itself as a calendar fixture, attracting corporate sponsors drawn to the buzz around a formerly untapped market and luring both the inevitable paparazzi and street-style jesters they seemingly exist to document.

Designers, too, clamoured to get in on a dedicated menswear week and the access it provided to international buyers and press.

And for a time it looked as if New York's men's week could hold its own.

Then, on the eve of the autumn shows, the CFDA made it clear that it had merged the men's week into a 10-day fashion calendar that started on Monday, with a scant three days dedicated exclusively to menswear before coed and womenswear shows begin.

What is more, the CFDA will no longer provide funding for the dedicated menswear week that was one of the key initiatives undertaken by Mr Steven Kolb, the group's chief executive.

"We've seen our budget drop by half, at least," Mr Kolb explained. "We haven't had a hard time finding the talent. We've had a hard time finding the funding."

Although the CFDA will continue to organise a men's fashion week, it will now be up to individual designers to find the venues, sponsorship and financing for shows that can cost hundreds of thousands to produce.

New York designer Ryohei Kawanishi is unaffected by the changes made to New York Fashion Week: Men's, but other designers are feeling the pain. PHOTO: THE NEW YORK TIMES

While those menswear-only shows will stay on the calendar, in different time slots and abbreviated formats, what remains to be seen is who will fill the roster.

Big guns like Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger no longer show menswear in New York.

And the list of promising talents that marked New York Fashion Week: Men's at its start has steadily dwindled over the last eight seasons. Where once close to 90 labels were on the schedule, there are currently just more than two dozen.

"The two significant changes are that we won't produce anything, though we'll be the organiser, and that everyone will be on their own," Mr Kolb said. "How that plays out, we'll see."

Perhaps, some suggest, the end of New York Fashion Week: Men's as a corporately funded monolith may also mark its rebirth as a proving ground for the scrappy independent labels that have been its driving force in recent years.

Somehow, the city that produced legacy labels like Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Perry Ellis has been lapped in recent years by its European competitors.

Yet while the concepts behind all the sneakers and hoodies now dominating European runways have origins in American sportswear, American designers seem to have lost the plot.

Few are the creative spheres in which New York plays the underdog; men's fashion at the moment appears to be one.

This may not, after all, be such a bad thing, as Mr Kolb noted. In a reformulated landscape, space opens up for the many independents that have proved to be the strength of New York Fashion Week: Men's.

Designers like Ryohei Kawanishi, whose Brooklyn-based Landlord label, while assuredly a flyspeck compared to a colossus like Balenciaga, still draws some of that luxury house's fanatical cultists to outfits like the candy-coloured faux fur coats he designed in 2017 and that were later spotted on rappers Wiz Khalifa and Migos.

"I never even expected to attract those people," Kawanishi said of his music world following as he prepared for a presentation based on 1920s athletic wear.

"Half the time when celebrities are wearing our things, I don't even know who they are."

Recently, Groupe, a menswear incubator, swooped in to support David Hart, the 37-year-old independent once cited by GQ as among the best new American menswear designers.

"If you're extremely talented and not quite making it as a business, you should not have to give up," said Mr James C. Jurney, the chief executive of the Seize sur Vingt clothing label and a force behind Groupe.

NYTIMES

GigPicks

Boon Chan Media Correspondent **recommends**

HUAYI 2019: IN::MUSIC JULIA WU "1994"
Australia-born Chinese singer-songwriter Julia Wu's (above) debut R&B-infused album 1:28 was released to critical acclaim in 2017.

Her 2018 follow-up record, 1994 Yi Jiu Jiu Shi (1994 Old Affairs As Before), references her year of birth and also lends the gig its name.
WHERE: Esplanade Annexe Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade
WHEN: Feb 23, 4pm
ADMISSION: $30 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

PHOTOS: BRIAN BOWEN SMITH, ESPLANADE – THEATRES ON THE BAY, INSTAGRAM/PET SHOP BOYS

JOSH GROBAN BRIDGES TOUR
Award-winning American singer-songwriter Josh Groban (left) finally holds his first concert in Singapore. His rich baritone has powered hits such as You Raise Me Up and You Are Loved (Don't Give Up).

The tour is named after his eighth studio album Bridges (2018), which contains a cover of Simon & Garfunkel's classic Bridge Over Troubled Water.
WHERE: The Star Theatre, 04-01 The Star Performing Arts Centre, 1 Vista Exchange Green
MRT: Buona Vista **WHEN:** Feb 25, 8pm **ADMISSION:** $108 to $328 from Sistic

PET SHOP BOYS THE SUPER TOUR
The most successful duo – singer Neil Tennant (left)and keyboardist Chris Lowe (far left) – in British music history bring their current world tour to Singapore. It started as a four-night residency called Inner Sanctum at London's Royal Opera House in 2016, which The Daily Telegraph described as "(encompassing) high culture, club culture, theatre, cinema, political satire and a mind-bending laser show".

The Pet Shop Boys formed in 1981 and their long list of hits includes It's A Sin, Go West and I'm With Stupid. Super (2016) is their 13th studio album.
WHERE: The Star Theatre, 04-01 The Star Performing Arts Centre, 1 Vista Exchange Green **MRT:** Buona Vista
WHEN: March 26, 8pm **ADMISSION:** $128 to $228 from Sistic

GIGS

Blackpink World Tour
South Korean girl group Blackpink will perform not only their hit songs, but also remix versions. The concert is brought in by Live Nation and One Production.
WHERE: Singapore Indoor Stadium, 2 Stadium Walk **MRT:** Stadium
WHEN: Feb 15, 7.30pm
ADMISSION: $128 - $268, tickets at sportshubtix.sg, Singapore Indoor Stadium Box Office & SingPost outlets
TEL: 3158-7888

Raghu Dixit Live
Indian singer-composer Raghu Dixit's unique brand of infectious, happy music transcends age, genre and language. His music is strongly rooted in Indian traditions and culture and he is known for presenting ancient Kannada poetry with a contemporary, global sound.
WHERE: Capitol Theatre, 17 Stamford Road **MRT:** City Hall **WHEN:** Feb 16, 7.30pm **ADMISSION:** $40 - $100, tickets & information available at showtickets.asia

Nickelback Live In Singapore
Canadian rock band Nickelback will hold their first concert in Singapore. They released their ninth studio album Feed The Machine in June 2017, which debuted in the Top 5 on the Billboard charts, and spent the better part of 2017 and last year performing over 80 sold-out shows around the world.
WHERE: Zepp@BigBox Singapore, 1 Venture Avenue **MRT:** Jurong East
WHEN: Feb 20, 8pm **ADMISSION:** $128
TEL: 6348-5555 **INFO:** sistic.com.sg

An Enchanted Evening With Nanyang Songbird Yudi Yap
Take a trip down memory lane and relive the golden years with some of the best-loved songs of the Nanyang region with evergreen singer Yudi Yap. She will perform jazzy renditions of classics such as Rose Rose I Love You, Dayung Sampan, Tian Mi Mi, Liu Lian Piao Xiang and Aiyomama.
WHERE: Esplanade Annexe Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/ City Hall **WHEN:** Feb 21 & 22, 8pm
ADMISSION: $30
INFO: www.esplanade.com

Na Ying Na World Tour Concert
Na Ying is considered one of the best female singers in China, having sold more than 10 million albums. She gained fame with the release of her hit single Conquer in 1998, which became one of the most popular Chinese songs in history.
WHERE: Resorts World Ballroom, Resorts World Convention Centre, 8 Sentosa Gateway
MRT: HarbourFront **WHEN:** Feb 23, 8pm **ADMISSION:** $48 - $288
TEL: 6348-5555
INFO: www.sistic.com.sg

In::music – The Freshman: What The Youth?!
Made up of Project Superstar 2 alumnae Carrie Yeo and Chen Diya, the Singapore pop duo The Freshman were formed in 2010 and the two have been winning fans with their original compositions. They released Growing Up in 2016, which features the karaoke hit Holding On.
WHERE: Esplanade Annexe Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/ City Hall **WHEN:** Feb 24, 4pm
ADMISSION: $30
TEL: 6348-5555 **INFO:** sistic.com.sg

Kodaline Live In Singapore
Irish rock band Kodaline will make their return to Singapore next month. The group released its new album Politics Of Living in September last year to rave reviews and are ready to embark on their upcoming world tour.
WHERE: Zepp@Big Box Singapore, 1 Venture Avenue **MRT:** Jurong East
WHEN: March 5, 8pm
ADMISSION: $128 **TEL:** 6348-5555
INFO: sistic.com.sg

Fei Yu Qing Farewell Concert
For the last time in Singapore, Fei Yu Qing, the Taiwanese ballad singer, will be back to woo his audiences in this farewell concert. Fei, who started his singing career in the late 1970s, is the younger brother of veteran host Chang Fei. Fei is known for his versatility and candidness and near flawless singing on stage and humour.
WHERE: Compass Ballroom, Resorts World Convention Centre, 8 Sentosa Gateway **MRT:** HarbourFront
WHEN: March 16 (8pm) & 17 (7.30pm)
ADMISSION: $28 - $258
TEL: 6348-5555 **INFO:** sistic.com.sg

TALKS

From Embarrassment To Icon: A Biography Of Raffles After His Death
This talk by Timothy Barnard will survey and analyse the commemoration of Singapore's founder, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, in the first 75 years of colonial rule, from the commissioning of statues to the attachment of his name to establishments and institutions.
WHERE: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place
MRT: Raffles Place
WHEN: Mon, 11am **ADMISSION:** Free
TEL: 6337-3685
INFO: www.fom.sg

Unmasking Plastic Surgery
Learn how plastic surgery can help relieve pain, rebuild the body and restore confidence at this public forum by the Singapore General Hospital. Topics include scars, lasers, ageing gracefully, droopy eyelids and rebuilding the body after cancer.
WHERE: Mochtar Riady Auditorium, SMU Admin Building, 81 Victoria Street **MRT:** Bras Basah/City Hall
WHEN: March 2, 9am - noon
ADMISSION: Free, register at https://bit.ly/2TiWC3L
TEL: 6576-2581/6576-7859 (office hours) **INFO:** E-mail Siti.Nabilah.zaine@sgh.com.sg or Muhammad.Shaheed.mohd.isa @sgh.com.sg

CLASSES

Valentine's Day Brush Lettering Workshop
Marmalade Pantry Downtown and SplashRunway Designs are conducting a beginner's brush lettering workshop with a Valentine's Day theme. Participants get to take home limited-edition brush lettering worksheets, a brush pen and a card that will be done in the class. The workshop includes brunch with coffee, tea or juice.
WHERE: The Marmalade Pantry Downtown, 01-01 Oasia Hotel Downtown, 100 Peck Seah Street
MRT: Tanjong Pagar
WHEN: Tomorrow, 11.30am - 2.30pm
ADMISSION: $88++ a person ($68++ for Mastercard holders), includes brunch; sign up at order.themarmaladepantry.com.sg
INFO: themarmaladepantry.com.sg

The Role Of A Director With K.Rajagopal
Veteran film-maker K. Rajagopal shares what makes a good director and how a director can inspire his cast and crew to harness their talents. Topics include creative approaches to shooting a film, working with actors and crew members and a director's responsibilities.
WHERE: Objectifs – Centre for Photography and Film, 155 Middle Road **MRT:** Bencoolen/Bugis
WHEN: Feb 20, 7.30 - 10pm
ADMISSION: Free **INFO:** E-mail ciNE65@objectifs.com.sg to register

ST English Masterclass (The Executive Edition Special: Creative Writing)
This course is conducted by Felix Cheong, who has published 13 books across various genres, from poetry to short stories. The recipient of the 2000 Young Artist award, who has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years, teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University. He will cover topics such as the basics of narrative writing; generating story ideas and creating characters, plots, twists and endings as well as turning life experience into stories and the publishing process.
WHERE: SPH News Centre, 1000 Toa Payoh North **MRT:** Braddell
WHEN: Feb 21, 10am - 6pm (lunch provided) **ADMISSION:** $499 a person, sign up at stskills.sg **TEL:** 6319-5076
INFO: E-mail stmasterclass@sph.com.sg

CHARITY

Speaker Tan Chuan-Jin's Photo Exhibition
Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan–Jin is raising funds for vulnerable communities here and abroad through his photography project, which showcases images from his travels over the years. Visitors can buy prints of the images in various forms, from postcards ($50 for 15 postcards in a folder) to a Special Photo Book Set ($1,000) and Premium Photo Book Set ($5,000) that are autographed by Mr Tan. Exclusive metal prints ($10,000 each) will be autographed and personally presented by Mr Tan during a high-tea session. Among the beneficiaries is The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund.
WHERE: Level 2 Concourse, Far East Plaza, 14 Scotts Road **MRT:** Orchard
WHEN: Till Feb 28, 11am - 7pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: www.spmf.org.sg

SPORTS

Super Rugby – Sunwolves Vs Sharks
This year's Super Rugby season kicks off with a match between Singapore's adopted home team, Hito-Communications Sunwolves, who won their first match here last year, and South Africa's Sharks.
WHERE: National Stadium, Singapore Sports Hub, 1 Stadium Drive **MRT:** Stadium
WHEN: Feb 16, 6.55 - 8.15pm
ADMISSION: From $10
INFO: sportshub.com.sg/SuperRugby

FoodPicks

Tan Hsueh Yun Food Editor recommends

YUSHENG FULL OF SURPRISES

It's just two of us for dinner at Blue Lotus Chinese Grill House, but there they are, those long yusheng chopsticks, at each place setting. We wonder if we can possibly finish a whole one.

"The yusheng might be too much for the two of you, it serves four," the wait staff says.

But the call of the chopsticks proves too strong to resist, so my friend and I order the restaurant's Signature Blue Lotus Yu Sheng ($48++ for two to four servings and $68++ for six to eight).

I like old-school yusheng, with sliced wolf herring, and my favourite is the one Dragon Phoenix serves. But there is a new challenger, because Blue Lotus' version is zesty and full of delicious surprises.

Of course, I am not thrilled that it comes with smoked salmon instead of wolf herring. How can yusheng be yusheng if the yu is not sheng (raw)?

Still, there is plenty else to like.

Dill fronds go with the salmon and add a spark of freshness, and we toss crispy deep-fried whitebait, salmon skin, honey-glazed walnuts, crunchy sweet potato sticks and rice vermicelli, sakura ebi and a large mound of pomelo sacs together.

All of this is bulked out, just a little, with mesclun and frisee and dressed with a honey yuzu and kumquat concoction. I love the citrusy dressing, which is not too sweet, but wish the yuzu flavour is stronger.

What makes this yusheng special is really the bright green scallion oil, which ties all the ingredients together and adds a herbaceous flavour to the salad.

Some yusheng are weighed down by soggy vegetables, but not this one.

Every mouthful is surprising – pomelo sacs burst in the mouth, a dill frond sitting conveniently on a slice of salmon is a reliably good flavour combination, the slight bitterness of walnuts balanced out by the honey glaze, those crisp whitebait with the soft salad leaves.

I love how Blue Lotus gives smart twists to classic Chinese dishes and proof of the chefs' ingenuity is on every platter of its signature yusheng.

Which, of course, we demolish.

WHERE: Blue Lotus Chinese Grill House, Blue Lotus Chinese Eating House and Blue Lotus Kitchen + Bar (go to website for addresses, phone numbers and opening hours) **AVAILABLE:** Until Feb 19, order takeaways at least one day in advance **INFO:** www.bluelotus.com.sg

YUSHENG WITH DELICIOUS DRESSING

Every year, I get to lo hei at Goodwood Park Hotel's Min Jiang at least once. It's a ritual I look forward to very much.

And every year, there is a showstopping yusheng to enjoy. This year, it's the Prosperity Fa Cai Yu Sheng ($168++ for 10 to 12 people, dine-in only).

What stands out is the dressing, which, aside from the traditional plum sauce, has lots of other unexpected ingredients. The sauce, together with sliced lemongrass, chilli padi, calamansi juice, rice wine and strawberry jam, sits for a week so all the ingredients meld. The lemongrass and chilli are removed and that dressing is ready for its starring role.

Peppery arugula, frisee, red sorrel and red mustard greens contrast with crunchier cousins such as carrots, daikon and strips of fried sweet potato.

The yusheng comes with slices of salmon, mercifully raw, baby abalone and a stack of housemade bak kwa match sticks. It is the Year of the Pig, after all.

I wish I could do a takeaway of this yusheng, but then I would miss the pretty painting on the platter of a mama pig and her seven piglets, under a cherry blossom tree, that chef Chan Hwan Kee does.

WHERE: Min Jiang, Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Road **MRT:** Orchard **TEL:** 6730-1704 **OPEN:** 11.30am to 2.30pm (Mondays to Saturdays), 11am to 2.30pm (Sundays), 6.30 to 10.30pm daily **INFO:** www.goodwoodparkhotel.com

SMOOTH, SILKY TAU HUAY

After a happy hour of shopping at the fabulous fabric and wallpaper store Onlewo in Jalan Besar, I stumble on a nondescript shop a couple of doors down, selling tau huay or beancurd. The place looks a little ramshackle, but I sit down for a bowl anyway.

A taste and I am blown away.

The tau huay, which I have with a little soya milk added to the bowl instead of syrup, has the kind of smoothness and silkiness I have never had in Singapore. Hong Kong, yes; Ipoh, for sure. But not Singapore. Where has Beancurd City been all my life?

Even better, the rich taste of soya beans comes at me in waves. The soya milk is perfect the first time, but slightly scalded the second – a common problem with soya milk chains. But I am not there for the soya milk, just the tau huay. And next time, perhaps a youtiao.

WHERE: Beancurd City, 133 Jalan Besar **MRT:** Jalan Besar **OPEN:** Noon to 8pm daily, no fixed day off

CHEESE TART SO GOOD

Food fads come and go so quickly in Singapore that looking at a baked cheese tart brings on waves of nostalgia. And to think it was all the rage just two years ago.

I wish I'd known about So Good's fantastic cheese tart ($2.50) at the peak of cheese tart madness. It more than lives up to the name of the chain of bakeries. I get mine from the cafe-restaurant in Midview City, and the bakery has outlets at Asia Square Tower 1 in Marina View and 100AM in Tras Street too.

While a lot of baked cheese tarts tend to be sweet, this one has a definite savoury vibe and a pronounced cream cheese flavour. The mousse-like filling is ever-so-light and the burnished top makes me instantly hungry.

Soft pastry that crumbles in the mouth, not in the hand, adds to the charm.

The bakery's other offerings are fairly standard – polo buns, mini chicken pies, soft bread filled with sausages and the like. There is a good Curry Chicken Doughnut ($1.80) which becomes phenomenally crisp after a couple of minutes in the toaster oven. It is not soggy with oil and the bread is not at all sweet. Even the curry filling has punch.

That curry doughnut is so good, but the cheese tart is great.

WHERE: So Good Char Chan Tang, 01-121 Midview City, 26 Sin Ming Lane **MRT:** Marymount **TEL:** 6570-2266 **OPEN:** 8am to 8pm daily

PHOTOS: BLUE LOTUS CHINESE GRILL HOUSE, GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL, TAN HSUEH YUN

FOOD

PROMOTIONS

Gourmet Hotdogs At Fatburger

Fatburger Singapore has launched the Classic Hot Dog ($6.90), Chilli Dog ($7.90) and Chilli Cheese Dog ($8.90), featuring grilled chicken sausages served on toasted brioche buns.
WHERE (MRT; TEL): 01-70/72 Kinex Mall, 11 Tanjong Katong Road (Paya Lebar; 6245-5563); 01-08/09 Velocity @ Novena Square, 238 Thomson Road (Novena; 6253-2758) **WHEN:** Kinex: 11am - 10pm (weekdays), 10am - 10pm (weekends); Velocity: 10am - 10pm daily **PRICE:** ($6.90 - $8.90) **INFO:** fatburgersg.com

VALENTINE'S DAY

Rhapsody Of Love At Se7enth

The Rhapsody Of Love set dinner at Se7enth is a three-course meal with pan-seared foie gras with fig mostarda, slow roasted barbecue pork ribs or miso cod fish, and a chocolate hazelnut ice cream sandwich with berries. Go alfresco at the pool terrace and enjoy two A Spritz Of Romance cocktails with the dinner. The cocktail features apple cider and watermelon topped with fresh strawberries and is available at The Bar ($12++, from noon).
WHERE: Oakwood Premier OUE Singapore, Level 7 OUE Downtown 1, 6 Shenton Way **MRT:** Tanjong Pagar **WHEN:** Tomorrow - Feb 17, 6 - 9.30pm **PRICE:** $108++ a couple (Se7enth), $128++ a couple (alfresco dining, only tomorrow, this Sun & Thu) **TEL:** 6812-6050 **INFO:** E-mail dining.opsg@oakwood.com

LOL (Lots Of Love) Cake From Tiong Bahru Bakery

Tiong Bahru Bakery has created the Lots Of Love – or LOL – cake by layering lime pain de genes with wild strawberry confit, white chocolate chantilly cream, strawberry mousse and almond crumble. Have it with the "love potion" rose mocha – scents of floral rose paired with chocolate and coffee, mixed with fresh milk, almond or soya milk (complimentary), or organic coconut milk (add $2+).
WHERE (MRT; TEL): 130E Minden Road (Botanic Gardens; 6877-4876), 43 Jalan Merah Saga (Holland V; 6877-4868), 56 Eng Hoon Street (Tiong Bahru; 6220-3430), B1-11 Raffles City (City Hall; 6333-4160), 01-16B Tangs Orchard (Orchard; 6735-3787) **WHEN/PRICE:** LOL Cake (Tue - Feb 17): $10.50+; rose mocha (till Feb 28): $7.50+ **INFO:** tiongbahrubakery.com

Romantic Indulgence At Blue Potato

Blue Potato's four-course Romantic Indulgence set dinner starts with a hazelnut butter scallop salad, followed by chilled pea soup. Mains choices are steak au poivre or Seared Ichimi Cod. Dessert is the Ivoire Raspberry Dome.
WHERE: Level 2 Swissotel Merchant Court, 20 Merchant Road **MRT:** Clarke Quay **WHEN:** Thu, 6.30 - 10pm **PRICE:** $88++ a person, includes glass of house wine **TEL:** 6239-1847/1848 **INFO:** E-mail dining.merchantcourt @swissotel.com

Neon Pigeon's Set Menu For Love Birds

Love birds celebrating at Neon Pigeon will get starters such as Tokyo hummus and chicken liver mousse. For mains, the choice is braised pork belly or grilled barramundi. Cherry Bomb – yakult sorbet, sake jelly and meringue – is the dessert.
WHERE: 1 Keong Saik Road **MRT:** Outram Park **WHEN:** Thu, 6pm **PRICE:** $65++ a person **TEL:** 6222-3623 **INFO:** E-mail info@neonpigeonsg.com

Go Gluten-Free At The Butcher's Wife

Modern European bistro
The Butcher's Wife is serving a three-course, gluten-free Valentine's Day dinner. The starter is cured beetroot salmon with compressed fennel, burnt orange and horseradish snow. The main course is grilled Black Onyx beef shoulder, and for dessert, it is coconut mousse with passionfruit, lime and roasted pineapple.
WHERE: 19 Yong Siak Street **MRT:** Tiong Bahru **WHEN:** Thu, 6 - 11pm **PRICE:** $55++ a person, includes a glass of prosecco **TEL:** 6221-9307 **INFO:** thebutcherswifesg.com

Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore's Offerings

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore's Colony offers a taste of Singapore with a Valentine's Day spread ($124++ an adult; $31++ - $62++ a child) that includes a live station serving lychee, rose and raspberry Vacherin ice cream. At one-Michelin-starred Summer Pavilion, which serves Cantonese cuisine, the five-course Valentine's Day set dinner includes dishes such as braised bird's nest with crab meat and bamboo pith.
WHERE: The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore, 7 Raffles Avenue **MRT:** Promenade **WHEN:** Thu, 6.30 - 10.30pm **PRICE:** $124++ - $198++ a person, includes glass of Champagne Barons de Rothschild Reserve Ritz Rose NV **TEL (INFO):** 6434-5288 (colony.com.sg), 6434-5286 (summerpavilion.com.sg)

Kelly Oysters With Chilli Pearls At The Ottomani

The seven-course Valentine's Day menu at The Ottomani starts with Kelly oysters from Ireland paired with chilli pearls, apple and preserved lemon. Other dishes include Hokkaido scallops and mezze bites before the mains of snapper or lamb tenderloin; and dessert.
WHERE: 48 Peck Seah Street **MRT:** Tanjong Pagar **WHEN:** Thu, 6pm - midnight **PRICE:** $148++ a person, add $88++ for drinks pairing **TEL:** 9231-9316 **INFO:** E-mail info@theottomani.com

Romantic River Cruise, Dinner With Summerlong

Riverside restaurant Summerlong will take couples on a romantic cruise to watch the Marina Bay Sands light show and for a three-course dinner.
WHERE: 01-04, 60 Robertson Quay **MRT:** Fort Canning **WHEN:** Thu; cruise: 7pm, dinner: 5 or 8.30pm **PRICE:** $200++ a couple, includes glass of prosecco each **TEL:** 6235-1225 **INFO:** E-mail info@summerlongsg.com

Sky-High Dining At Faber Peak

One Faber Group will be serving four-course set menus at its dining concepts on Mount Faber. Enjoy a cable-car ride in the Stardust Cabin ($328++ a couple), where the main course is provencal beef steak or tandoori barramundi fillet. At Arbora ($248++ a couple), the mains choice is beef tenderloin with Thai green curry risotto or pistachio crusted salmon fillet. At Dusk Restaurant & Bar ($268++ a couple), it is beef tenderloin with truffle mashed potatoes or grilled king prawn.
WHERE: Faber Peak, 109 Mount Faber Road **MRT:** HarbourFront **WHEN:** Thu, 6 - 9pm (Stardust Cabin, 5 - 8.30pm) **PRICE:** $248++ - $328++ a couple **TEL:** 6377-9688 **INFO:** E-mail guestrelations@onefabergroup.com

Mozzarella Demo At The Mast

The Mast is giving couples a mozzarella-making demonstration (6.45pm) when they celebrate Valentine's Day at the restaurant with the four-course set dinner.
WHERE: 01-05/08 Frasers Tower, 182 Cecil Street **MRT:** Tanjong Pagar **WHEN:** Wed - Feb 15, 5pm **PRICE:** $140++ a couple **TEL:** 6513-8010 **INFO:** themast.com.sg

New Dishes At Le Binchotan For Valentine's Day

Every dish on the Valentine's Day menu is new at Le Binchotan. Highlights include chicken consomme soup prepared with binchotan-grilled chicken.
WHERE: 115 Amoy Street **MRT:** Telok Ayer **WHEN:** Wed - Feb 15, 6 & 8.30pm **PRICE:** $229++ a couple **TEL:** 6224-1045 **INFO:** E-mail reservations@lebinchotan.sg

Romantic Escapade At Maggie Joan's

On the five-course set menu are snacks such as hamachi crudo and the main course of spiced lamb paired with salmarejo sauce or barramundi and mussels. A vegetarian menu is also available.
WHERE: 110 Amoy Street **MRT:** Telok Ayer **WHEN:** Thu, 6 - 11pm **PRICE:** $90++ a person, includes glass of champagne **TEL:** 6221-5564 **INFO:** maggiejoans.com

ArtsPicks

Olivia Ho recommends

I LIGHT SINGAPORE
For the bicentennial edition of the night festival, artists dressed up bridges along the Singapore River, projected a ghostly 19th-century boat into Marina Bay and placed in Fort Canning Park a piano that, when played, turns a nearby clearing into a venue for a light show.

The last, Keys Of Light (right), is an interactive installation by Netherlands-based projection art studio MrBeam. Farther up the hill from it, in Raffles House, is Reflecting Holons by Dutch artists Jetske Visser and Michiel Martens, made from long strips of oil-like transparent foils that, when spun by micro-controllers, resemble bubbles.

To see the art in action, check out this Art In 60 Seconds video at www.straitstimes.com/files/art-in-60-seconds-i-light-singapore
WHERE: Various locations in Marina Bay. Keys Of Light and Reflecting Holons are on Fort Canning Raffles Terrace (accessible by steps from Hill Street) **MRT:** City Hall/Clarke Quay/Raffles Place
WHEN: Till Feb 24, 7.30 to 11pm daily with extended hours to midnight on Fridays and Saturdays
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: www.ilightmarinabay.sg

EXPLORATIONS: CHINESE INK AT NAFA
The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) marks the Chinese New Year season with this traditional Chinese ink exhibition of 26 works by 15 artists, including the school's students and alumni.

Works include National Arts Council Young Artist Award recipient Hong Sek Chern's Painting (With Blush Red, 2018, above).

Tomorrow, Nafa will also hold a public demonstration of spring couplet calligraphy.

Proceeds from the works sold at the exhibition and demonstration will go towards the Nafa Development Fund.
WHERE: Lim Hak Tai Gallery, Nafa Campus 1, 80 Bencoolen Street **MRT:** Bencoolen/Bugis **WHEN:** Till Feb 24, 11am to 7pm, Tuesdays to Sundays. Closed on Mondays. The calligraphy demonstration is tomorrow from 11am to 2pm
ADMISSION: Free **INFO:** www.nafa.edu.sg/events/explorations-chinese-ink-at-nafa

DEVICES
From egg traps for predatory snakes to the building of artificial swiftlet houses to churn out edible birds' nest at a lucrative speed, Malaysian artist Chris Chong Chan Fui's solo exhibition looks at the mechanising of nature and ecological exploitation (above, Egg With 18K Gold Hook, 2019).
WHERE: Chan + Hori Contemporary, 02-09 Gillman Barracks, 6 Lock Road
MRT: Labrador Park
WHEN: Till March 1, 11am to 7pm, Tuesdays to Fridays; noon to 6pm, weekends. Closed on Mondays
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: www.chanhori.com

WITHIN WITHOUT
Singapore artist Andre Wee fuses art and technology in his solo exhibition, which features both 2D interactive prints with augmented reality digital elements and 3D printed sculptures created via digital sculpting that play with the idea of the familiar and the uncanny (left, Green City 2.0).

Wee, 30, says he chose to work with these media in an attempt to bring newer forms of technology into the traditional art space.

"They may be rough around the edges or primitive because these are emerging technologies, but I hope that this inclusion of them into the gallery acts as a starting point for more of such works to come."
WHERE: Mulan Gallery, 01-07, 36 Armenian Street
MRT: City Hall/Bras Basah
WHEN: Till Feb 23, 11.30am to 6.30pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: www.mulangallery.com.sg

PHOTOS: CHAN + HORI CONTEMPORARY, I LIGHT SINGAPORE, MULAN GALLERY, NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

ARTS

BOOKS

Book Launch: They Told Us To Move: Dakota-Cassia
Dakota Crescent was one of Singapore's oldest public housing estates. In 2016, its residents were relocated to make way for redevelopment. This book tells the story of the relocation through the eyes of Dakota residents, volunteers and academics.
WHERE: library@harbourfront, 03-05 VivoCity, 1 Harbourfront Walk
MRT: HarbourFront **WHEN:** Feb 23, 2 - 3.30pm **ADMISSION:** Free **INFO:** To register, go to bit.ly/2FLAr36-conversations-on-relocation

CONCERTS

The Low Lifes
In an evening of music inspired by literature and classical texts, these works will be performed by a unique brass ensemble. The Low Lifes comprise three trombone players and one tuba player, which is the typical arrangement for a low brass section of a symphony orchestra.
WHERE: Esplanade Concourse, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/City Hall **WHEN:** Wed, 6.45 & 7.45pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: esplanade.com

VCH Organ Series: Thomas Trotter – Arrival, 1819
British virtuoso organist Thomas Trotter will present a recital featuring organ greats. Works include those from Bach and Ginastera as well as familiar British tunes such as Holst's Jupiter and Elgar's Land Of Hope And Glory.
WHERE: Victoria Concert Hall, 9 Empress Place **MRT:** Raffles Place
WHEN: Feb 15, 7.30pm
ADMISSION: $20 **TEL:** 6348-5555
INFO: www.sistic.com.sg

We Are Singer-Songwriters: Sarah Cheng-De Winne
With humble beginnings as a choir girl, Sarah Cheng-De Winne won her first solo singing competition at age 14. Under the informal mentorship of established jazz musicians and musical theatre practitioners in Singapore, her love of poetic writing turned into songwriting.
WHERE: Esplanade Outdoor Theatre, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/City Hall **WHEN:** Feb 17, 6.45pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: esplanade.com

DANCE

ICN 2019 – Arunika: A Musical
Inspired by one of the darkest untold stories in Indonesian history, ICN Cultural Production presents a musical depicting the era when slavery was widespread throughout the region.
WHERE: Drama Centre Theatre, Level 3 National Library Building, 100 Victoria Street **MRT:** City Hall/Bugis **WHEN:** Feb 16, 2.30 & 7.30pm
ADMISSION: $18 - $24, go to show.icnmusical.com

Alice, Bob & Eve
Alice, Bob & Eve is a movement research "living laboratory" hidden in a gallery space, probing how digital technologies choreograph people's movements in society. Over four hours, witness how Alice, Bob and Eve accumulate and analyse forms of data, while mediating between humanising machines and coding humans.
WHERE: Sota Gallery, Level 2 School of the Arts Singapore, 1 Zubir Said Drive
MRT: Dhoby Ghaut/Bencoolen
WHEN: Feb 22 & 23, 4.30 - 8.30pm
ADMISSION: $16 - $20, tickets & information at alicebobeve.peatix.com (each ticket entitles visitors to multiple entries for both days)

EXHIBITIONS (MUSEUMS)

DigiMuse Presents
Launched in conjunction with Singapore Art Week 2019, this edition explores the coming together of art, culture and technology through the use of new creative tools. The featured art installations utilise technology such as immersive reality, robotics, artificial intelligence, 3D printing and social media.
WHERE: National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road
MRT: Bras Basah/Dhoby Ghaut
WHEN: Till Feb 17, 10am - 7pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: nationalmuseum.sg

Raffles In South-east Asia: Revisiting The Scholar And Statesman
This exhibition presents a complex, multi-layered picture of Singapore's founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, while showcasing the rich artistic and cultural heritage of Java and the Malay world. It is a collaboration between the British Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum.
WHERE: Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place **MRT:** Raffles Place
WHEN: Till April 28, 10am - 7pm daily (Fridays till 9pm)
ADMISSION: Singaporeans & permanent residents: $12 (free for students & seniors); foreign residents & tourists: $20 ($15 for students & seniors) **TEL:** 6332-7798
INFO: acm.org.sg

EXHIBITIONS (GALLERIES)

I Am You: Elodie Chandernagor
Presented by UltraSuperNew Gallery, this photographic exhibition by French artist Elodie Chandernagor challenges the illusion of self and explores the human body.
WHERE: 109 Rowell Road
MRT: Jalan Besar
WHEN: Feb 15 - March 15, 11am - 7pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: https://bit.ly/2CW5tS3

The Avant-Garde Is Not Afraid Of A Long March
Presented by ShanghART Singapore, this exhibition features works by 12 artists of different generations. Their individual breakthroughs and progressions chart the evolution of Chinese contemporary art through the years.
WHERE: ShanghART Singapore, 02-22 Gillman Barracks, 9 Lock Road
MRT: Labrador Park
WHEN: Feb 16, 4 - 7pm; Feb 17 - April 18, 11am - 7pm; closed on Mon & Tue
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: shanghartsingapore.com

Duo Exhibition: Mauro Corda & Lee Jung Woong
Opera Gallery's dual exhibition showcases realism and imagination when East meets West and the harmonious blend of cultures by featuring two contrasting aesthetics.
WHERE: Opera Gallery, 02-16 Ion Orchard, 2 Orchard Turn
MRT: Orchard
WHEN: Feb 22 - March 9, 11am - 8pm (Mon - Fri), 10am - 8pm (Sat & Sun)
ADMISSION: Free
TEL: 6735-2618
INFO: E-mail spore@operagallery.com

THEATRE

Off Centre
The Necessary Stage's Off Centre returns 26 years after its premiere in 1993. Written by Haresh Sharma and directed by Alvin Tan, it is a landmark play in the history of Singapore theatre, best remembered for presenting an honest and unflinching look at mental illness and the stigma surrounding it. It follows the unlikely friendship between Saloma and Vinod and traces their journeys as they deal with their personal conflicts as well as social prejudices on mental health.
WHERE: Victoria Theatre, 9 Empress Place
MRT: Raffles Place
WHEN: Till Sun, Wed - Feb 17, 8pm (Wed - Sat), 3pm (Sat & Sun)
ADMISSION: $36 - $45, 20 per cent discount for students, full-time national servicemen & seniors. Go to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555
TEL: 6440-8115
INFO: E-mail admin@necessary.org

Fun With Hand Puppets
Get insights into the art of manipulating hand puppets with instructors from The Finger Players. No experience is needed.
WHERE: Esplanade Forecourt Garden (near Jubilee Bridge), 1 Esplanade Drive
MRT: Esplanade/City Hall
WHEN: Feb 15 & 16, 5.30 & 6.30pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: esplanade.com

Checkpoint Theatre Presents: Still Life
What happens when an artist picks up her paintbrush after a long hiatus? Does the body still remember what has been lived? Or are the senses dulled by time? Dana Lam rediscovers and reclaims her journey from the 1950s through her twin first loves: writing and painting.
WHERE: 72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road
MRT: Fort Canning
WHEN: Feb 28 - March 10, 8pm (Thu - Sat), 3pm (Sat & Sun)
ADMISSION: $45 (go to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555)

FILMS

Cold War (2018, TBA)
Winner of the Best Director award at last year's Cannes Film Festival, this Polish film with English subtitles is set against the backdrop of the 1950s Cold War in Poland, in which two people of different backgrounds and temperaments begin an almost impossible romance.
WHERE: GV Suntec City, 3 Temasek Boulevard **MRT:** Promenade/ Esplanade **WHEN:** Tomorrow, 1pm **ADMISSION:** Singapore Film Society membership, from $18 a month **TEL:** 9017-0160 **INFO:** E-mail info@singaporefilmsociety.com

The Teenage Textbook Movie stars Caleb Goh and Melody Chen (both above). PHOTO: CATHAY

The Teenage Textbook Movie (1998, PG)
Nostalgic, hilarious and unapologetically Singaporean, director Philip Lim's adaptation of Adrian Tan's best-selling novel is a love letter to the 1990s. Mui Ee (Melody Chen) and her best friend Sissy Song (Lim Hwee Sze) enrol in the fictitious Paya Lebar Junior College, where she encounters boys and experiences first love.
WHERE: The Projector, Level 5 Golden Mile Tower, 6001 Beach Road **MRT:** Nicoll Highway **WHEN:** Thu, 8.30pm **ADMISSION:** $13.50 (standard), $11.50 (concession) **INFO:** theprojector.sg

Documentary: Factory (Super)Women
This film portrays the lives of factory women who paved the way for Singapore's economic success. Inspired by his mother and grandmother's experiences as factory workers, producer Pang Wei Han records the oral history of female factory workers as they reminisce about their lives. The documentary is infused with their bittersweet memories of factory work – from the stress of the production line to the sense of community and sisterhood with their fellow workers.
WHERE: Jurong Town Hall, 9 Jurong Town Hall Road **MRT:** Jurong East **WHEN:** Feb 23, 11am & Feb 24, 8pm **ADMISSION:** Free, tickets from factorysuperwomen.peatix.com

Downtown East Outdoor Movie Screening: Wall-E (2008, G)
In the distant future, a small waste-collecting robot embarks on a journey that will decide the fate of mankind. This outdoor movie screening held every last Saturday of the month at Downtown East includes free rainbow popcorn and nachos and cheese.
WHERE: Open Plaza 2 (outside D'Marquee), 1 Pasir Ris Close **MRT:** Pasir Ris **WHEN:** Feb 23, 7.30 - 10pm **ADMISSION:** Free **INFO:** downtowneast.com.sg

The Chinese Lives Of Uli Sigg (2016, NC16)
Directed by art historian Michael Schindhelm, this film is a history of China's recent opening up to the West and of the West's embrace of Chinese contemporary art, through the eyes of Sigg and the artists he championed.
WHERE: The Projector, Level 5 Golden Mile Tower, 6001 Beach Road **MRT:** Nicoll Highway **WHEN:** Feb 28, 8pm **ADMISSION:** $13.50 (standard), $11.50 (concession) **INFO:** theprojector.sg

NATURE

Bird Watching Along The Southern Ridges
Join this bird-watching tour at the Southern Ridges, where up to 43 species of birds have been spotted so far. This tour will take participants through the Forest Walk and the Singing Forest in search of these birds. Take along a pair of binoculars or a camera with a zoom function for a better experience.
WHERE: Faber Hill Park, plaza area at Henderson Waves **MRT:** Telok Blangah **WHEN:** Feb 16, 7.30 - 9.30am **ADMISSION:** Free, register at nparks.gov.sg **INFO:** E-mail Titia_Leong@nparks.gov.sg & Anne_Ng@nparks.gov.sg

Coney Island-Lorong Halus Ramble
This tour conducted by Nature Society (Singapore) will take participants aged 12 and older to explore Coney Island. It starts at Punggol MRT station and ends at Lorong Halus.
WHERE/MRT: Meet at Pandian (8am) at Punggol MRT station **WHEN:** Feb 16, 8am - 1pm **ADMISSION:** Free, for Nature Society (Singapore) members, go to nss.org.sg for membership details

Croc Talk: The Estuarine Crocodiles At Main Bridge
Learn about the estuarine crocodiles that bask in the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve with a National Parks volunteer, who will regale participants with information about the crocodiles' characteristics and behaviour. Participants can also observe the crocodiles.
WHERE: Main bridge at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Wetland Centre (Neo Tiew entrance) **MRT:** Kranji **WHEN:** Feb 17, 3 - 5pm **ADMISSION:** Free **TEL:** 6794-1401 **INFO:** E-mail nparks_sbwr@nparks.gov.sg

TOURS

Night Heritage Tour
Did you know that the history of Fort Canning dates back to the 14th century? In this night tour held in conjunction with the Festival at the Fort @ i Light 2019, participants will hear the intriguing stories and legends that shroud the Forbidden Hill.
WHERE: Raffles House, Raffles Terrace, Fort Canning **MRT:** Fort Canning **WHEN:** Feb 16, 7 - 8.30pm **ADMISSION:** Free, register at www.nparks.gov.sg **INFO:** E-mail jason_ooi@nparks.gov.sg

KIDS

Terrific Tales: Oink & Squeak!
The Storytelling Centre revisits classics such as the three little pigs who outwit the big, bad wolf; the old woman whose pig refused to jump over a stile; and a piglet whose ambition was to become king. Also, squeak along with a mouse family as it goes in search of the ideal husband for its little mouse. There will be a simple craft activity.
WHERE: The Artground at Goodman Arts Centre, 90 Goodman Road **MRT:** Mountbatten **WHEN:** Sun, Feb 17 & 24, 11.30am - 12.15pm **ADMISSION:** $10 for a parent-and-child pair **INFO:** storytellingcentrelimited.com

Sara Goes Gardening (A Guided Tour)
Sara the botanicosaurus, her siblings and friends discover the joy of gardening at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Join Sara as she learns fascinating facts about aloe vera, lemongrass and other nutritious herbs and spices. Also, pick up tips on how to grow your favourite plants.
WHERE: Visitor services desk at Jacob Ballas Children's Garden, Singapore Botanic Gardens, 1 Cluny Road **MRT:** Botanic Gardens **WHEN:** Feb 23, 10 - 11am **ADMISSION:** $9 a child (includes $3 Sara Goes Gardening workbook), $6 for each accompanying adult, register at www.nparks.gov.sg **INFO:** E-mail nparks_sbg_edu@nparks.gov.sg

Kids' Fun With Rainforest Life @ Rifle Range
The green domain at the end of Rifle Range Road is home to wildlife unique to the tropical rainforest. Explore this terrain with a guide who will show the plants, insects and birds that call it home.
WHERE: Rifle Range Road **MRT:** Beauty World **WHEN:** Feb 24, 8 - 10am **ADMISSION:** $10 a child, $2 for Nature Society (Singapore) members, register your children (aged four - 12) at tinyurl.com/nsskidsevent, registration closes on Feb 16 **INFO:** E-mail gloria_seow@yahoo.com

LAST CALL

La Cenerentola By Rossini
Under the direction of Edith Podesta, OperaLab returns with a light-hearted fully staged opera production of Rossini's La Cenerentola, which follows its successful presentation of Mozart's Cosi Fan Tutte last March.
WHERE: Esplanade Concourse, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/ City Hall **WHEN:** Sun, 4.30pm **ADMISSION:** Free **INFO:** www.esplanade.com

Golden Prosperous Year
Celebrate Chinese New Year with local getai singers Wang Lei, Hao Hao, Li Pei Fen, Bao Bei Sisters, Zhong Jin Ling, Zheng Ying Ying and veteran Malaysian singers Huang Xiao Feng and Zhuang Xue Zhong.
WHERE: Resorts World Theatre, Resorts World Sentosa, 8 Sentosa Gateway **MRT:** HarbourFront **WHEN:** Sun, 1 & 4pm **ADMISSION:** $38 - $88 **TEL:** 6348-5555 **INFO:** www.sistic.com.sg

Flora Goddess
This dance is about two beautiful flowers, Da Mian and Bu Zhuang. A spider is jealous of their lives and disguises itself as a flower to inflict harm on one of them.
WHERE: Esplanade Theatre, 1 Esplanade Drive **MRT:** Esplanade/ City Hall **WHEN:** Today, 3 & 7pm & tomorrow, 3pm **ADMISSION:** $38 - $128, tickets from www.esplanade.com

• The listings on these Happenings pages are free. Write to Life Happenings, Life, The Straits Times,1000 Toa Payoh North, Singapore 318994 or e-mail stlife@sph.com.sg at least two weeks ahead. Include the name of the event, organiser, venue, date and time, ticket prices and nearest MRT station, as well as your name, address and contact number. We reserve the right to edit or reject items. Go to www.straitstimes.com (click on Lifestyle) for more listings.

FilmPicks

John Lui Film Correspondent **recommends**

JAPANESE FILM FESTIVAL

One of the closing films of this year's edition is the drama, Early Summer (1951, PG, 125 minutes), from revered director Yasujiro Ozu.
He is in his element here, examining how people behave in family units, especially when personal desires and family duty are in conflict.
Actress Setsuko Hara (far right, with Chikage Awashima) won acclaim for playing Noriko, a woman of marriageable age caught between her family's wishes and her own wants.
WHERE: The Projector, Level 5 Golden Mile Tower, 6001 Beach Road **MRT:** Nicoll Highway **WHEN:** Sunday, 4.30pm **ADMISSION:** $13.50 **INFO:** theprojector.sg

PHOTOS: THE PROJECTOR, UIP

LEANING INTO THE WIND: ANDY GOLDSWORTHY (PG)
97 minutes

British artist Andy Goldsworthy makes art out of things he finds on the land: twigs, rocks, flowers and other natural objects.
Unlike other artists, who might work with clay or paint in a studio, how Goldsworthy walks into fields and forests to bend, fold, cut and arrange objects is visually fascinating.
German director Thomas Riedelsheimer's camera follows the artist to the outdoors and also into galleries and museums.
WHERE: The Projector, Level 5 Golden Mile Tower, Beach Road **MRT:** Nicoll Highway **WHEN:** Sunday, 5.30pm **ADMISSION:** $13.50 **INFO:** theprojector.sg

LADY BIRD (M18)
Showing on HBO, HBO On Demand and HBO Go

There have been other good coming-of-age stories with female protagonists – The Edge Of Seventeen (2016) and The Diary Of A Teenage Girl (2015) come to mind – but what sets this one apart is the compellingly drawn mother-daughter relationship.
Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson (Saoirse Ronan) is a high-schooler who dreams of leaving home for college, to escape her controlling mother, Marion (Laurie Metcalf), and what she considers the cultural desert of Sacramento, California.
In the meantime, she and best friend Julie (Beanie Feldstein) learn about femininity, boys and sex, the meaning of friendship and living with parents who are flawed human beings.

Library talks by seasoned journalists
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What's trending for travel in the US and beyond

Lee Siew Hua
Travel Writer, The Straits Times

Richard Launder
President and CEO of Destination America and Director of The Travel Corporation USA

Central Public Library
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B1-01 Programme Zone

Friday, Feb 15, 2019
7 to 8.30pm
(Registration starts at 6pm)

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Shirts freshly scorched with an iron are hot

For Naomi Mishkin's clothing line, the artist and fashion designer burns each shirt using a vintage British iron. PHOTO: NYTIMES

Budding designer burns each Bad Wife Shirt in her mother's basement

NEW YORK • Naomi Mishkin, 30, is an artist and budding fashion designer whose work frequently takes everyday objects and subverts them with a clever, feminist-skewed twist.

In a 2017 piece called Pedestal (Dress Form), she took a traditional dress form and remodelled it after her own torso, complete with a slight paunch and sagging shoulders.

Her artwork has been shown at the Nunnery Gallery in London and the Edmond Rostand Media Library in Paris.

In 2014, after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, a college friend introduced her to Mr Ed Romer, the founder of Xpozure, a contemporary art gallery in Wilton, Connecticut.

They immediately bonded over a shared passion for German artists such as Otto Dix and Christian Schad. He commissioned her first solo show, which opened the following year.

The site-specific installation, kNothing: A Brief History, featured wall-sized photographs of black magnetic chalkboards, annotated with a timeline of conceptual art.

"The exhibition showed me that my work could exist outside of my studio and my head in a way that it hadn't before," Mishkin said.

She has had a lifelong passion for making clothes and, last October, she started a small-batch clothing line called Naomi Nomi, offering basics with unexpected details.

The Bad Wife Shirt is a crisp button-down cotton shirt with an iron burn scorched on its front.

Mishkin burns each shirt in her mother's basement, using a vintage British iron plugged into a 220-volt socket that she had installed.

The process emits a potent smell: Mishkin compared it to freshly baked cookies.

The limited-edition shirts are US$180 (S$244) and are sold at Meantime, a boutique in the Bushwick neighbourhood of Brooklyn, as well as on her website.

This month, she is adding scarves to the clothing collection, based on, among other things, the gridlike design found on green cutting mats. A selection of women's garments is also planned for the autumn.

"What I'm building towards is a small signature collection, sort of along the lines of the seven easy pieces collection," she said, referring to Donna Karan's influential first collection in 1985.

Mishkin is not the first member of her family to produce clothing: Her maternal grandfather owned a wedding dress company in New York's garment district.

Her maternal great-grandparents were a pattern cutter on the Lower East Side and a seamstress.

"Pretty much from the moment we landed in this country, we were shmatte people," she said.

NYTIMES

Ralph Lauren spends big to lure younger buyers

NEW YORK • Ralph Lauren is not just about plain polo shirts and peacoats. It is about the hype.

Looking for some buzz, the 52-year-old fashion house is using tactics straight from the "hypebeast" playbook – industry slang for shoppers who obsess about clothes that get extensive publicity.

Similar to Apple fanatics who camp out in advance of a new iPhone release, these devoted buyers are willing to stand in line for hours to get their hands on the latest drop of sneakers or T-shirts from brands such as Supreme or A Bathing Ape.

"We're in the brand-building business," Ralph Lauren chief executive officer Patrice Louvet said in an interview on Tuesday.

That comes at a cost. The company increased its marketing investment 18 per cent in fiscal 2019 compared with the year before.

Mr Louvet plans to increase that budget to 5 per cent of total sales – which would be more than US$300 million (S$407 million) – to court younger buyers.

"We do want to make sure we have competitive marketing support" to lure new shoppers to the brand, he said.

That cash will be spent largely on social and digital as the brand moves away from traditional print advertisements.

The company has brought on a new cohort of younger celebrities to sell its goods, such as Taylor Hill, the face of its Romance fragrance. The 22-year-old supermodel walks in the world's biggest fashion shows and has 12.3 million followers on Instagram.

A holiday gift campaign included social media-savvy stars Rachel Zoe, Cameron Dallas and Olivia Palermo.

So far, the boosted marketing budget has been a successful piece of the company's revitalisation plan, along with a cutback on discounts and inventory.

Last quarter, it reversed a streak of same-store sales declines going back to 2015. On Tuesday, the company reported rosy earnings that exceeded analysts' estimates and said its marketing during the crucial holiday season paid off, sending shares up the most in eight months.

In recent years, Europe's luxury houses have concluded that streetwear cannot be ignored if they are to win over millennials and Generation Z.

Last May, Louis Vuitton hired Virgil Abloh, the designer behind the Off-White streetwear label, to lead men's design. That same month, Supreme had its high-fashion moment at a US$1-million auction in Paris. Yet, few of the United States' oldest fashion brands have fully embraced the skater-friendly clothes that have become a cultural phenomenon.

Ralph Lauren, however, is starting to learn. When the brand released its Winter Stadium collection last autumn, it partnered streetwear mainstays Opening Ceremony and e-commerce site HBX.

Last November, Ralph Lauren released a collaboration with British streetwear label Palace.

Rather than sell the items in limited quantities across all its stores, the clothes were sold in a few select Ralph Lauren locations and speciality boutiques such as Dover Street Market, a Commes des Garcons store in South Korea and online through the Polo app.

The strategy is right out of the classic sneaker drop playbook: Create scarcity and borrow the credibility of a partner label.

Upon release, the Ralph Lauren website struggled to keep up with demand and Palace items are now selling for much more than their retail prices on the secondary market, as limited-edition goods often do. A Palace x Ralph Lauren sweater with a preppy bear on a skateboard that retailed for US$475 is going for about US$800 on popular streetwear reselling site StockX.

Seventy-five per cent of shoppers who bought items from the collaboration were new customers, Mr Louvet said. Those buyers were about 10 years younger on average than the usual Ralph Lauren shopper, according to company data. BLOOMBERG

Banksy's painting, Love Is In The Bin, is on loan for a month to the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden, where the public can view it free of charge. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Free viewing of Banksy's Love Is In The Bin in Germany

BADEN-BADEN (Germany) • Love Is In The Bin, the work by graffiti artist Banksy that shredded itself live after it was sold at auction last year, went on display at a German museum – after officials had made sure its shredding mechanism was no longer working.

The painting was originally auctioned as Girl With Balloon, the image of a young girl holding a heart-shaped red balloon that has become the artist's most popular since it was first sprayed onto London's Waterloo Bridge in 2002.

But the moment the auctioneer's gavel fell, a hidden mechanism inside the frame shredded half the painting, which had just been sold for more than £1 million (S$1.8 million).

Museum director Henning Schaper said it had been anxious to avoid being the victim of another of the "subversive, clever" artist's practical jokes and seeing the rest of the painting shred itself while it was in its charge.

"We opened up the frame and found the shredder machinery, the battery holders, the wires and satisfied ourselves that the batteries had been removed and the wires cut," he said after curators wearing white gloves had carefully hung the work in its new place.

The owner, an anonymous European art collector, agreed to go through with the purchase of the painting, which the artist officially renamed after its shredding, and has now loaned it to the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden for a month.

The museum will not charge the public to see the painting.

Mr Schaper said that as Banksy was an advocate of the democratisation of art and a street artist, it would be wrong to make the public pay to see it.

"We wanted to engage with his philosophy by hanging the art work where people don't have to pay to get in and can experience Banksy's art and join us in a critical debate on developments in the art market," he said.

The painting will be on display in the south-western city until March 3 before it is moved to the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, which will also not charge visitors to view it. REUTERS

Comics

BABY BLUES

GARFIELD

Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG) (IE)
10.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
1.30 Films & Stars (PG) (V)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 4 (SC)
2.30 Talking Point 2018 (CA)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG) (IE)
4.00 Make You Laugh Out Loud 3 (V)
4.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.30 Cine On 5: Evan Almighty (PG) (CC) (M)
8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CA)
10.00 Friday Night Movie: Bridge Of Spies (PG) (M) (Premiere)
AM
12.50 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
1.20 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
3.10 Lethal Weapon (PG13) (D)
4.10 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
4.40 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG) (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 The Next (V)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (CA)
8.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Focus (CC) (CA)
10.30 The Fairy Couple (Chinese Opera)
11.30 How Are You? (PG) (CC) (D)
PM
12.30 Cheap & Good (V)
1.00 News 8 At One (HD)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Cookie Master (SC)
2.30 The Precedents (PG) (D)
3.30 Golden Age Talentime (CC) (V)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 When Duty Calls (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (News)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Body SOS 7 (CC) (V)
8.30 New Year, Old Taste (CC) (IE)
9.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Food And Beverage Investigators 8 (IE)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)
1.00 Lady Investigators (D)
2.00 Fiery Passion (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Chinese Dating (V)
4.30 King Of The Kitchens (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Girl Who Sees Smells (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Hello Taiwan (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 Hello Taiwan (IE)
AM
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.02 Champions For Change
11.00 News Now
PM
1.02 Insight
2.00 News Now
4.02 Champions For Change
5.00 News Now
7.02 Wild City (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 Conversation With (CC)
9.30 Super Octogenarians (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.02 Insight
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Conversation With
1.30 Super Octogenarians
2.00 News Now
2.30 Correspondents' Diary
3.02 Champions For Change
4.00 News Now
4.30 Correspondents' Diary
5.02 Conversation With
5.30 Super Octogenarians
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Aasai Aasaiya – Cooking for Love (IE)
4.00 Priyasakhi (D)
4.30 Thedal – Star Search 2016 (V)
5.30 Mighty Raju Animation Series (S)
6.00 Suryaputhri 2 (Malayalam) (PG) (D)
7.00 Arinthum Ariyaamalum (S)
7.30 Janani D/O Madhavan (CC) (S)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Indian Beat 9 (HD) (CC) (IE)
9.30 Udhaya (PG) (CC) (M)
AM
12.30 Tamil Seithi (News) (R)
1.00 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Tip The Mouse (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (P)
11.00 Mouk (P)
11.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
PM
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)
12.30 Teddies (P)
1.00 Coconut The Little Dragon (P)
1.30 Tip The Mouse (P)
2.00 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (P)
3.00 Mouk (P)
3.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (S)
4.30 Captain Flinn And The Pirate Dinosaurs (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Marcus Level (S)
6.00 OddBods (HD) (S)
6.30 The Diary Of Amos Lee (S)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (CC) (S)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (CC) (S)
8.00 Turning Mecard (S)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (CC) (S)
9.00 Tryfactor (CC) (Sports)
9.30 ONE Championship 2018/19 – ONE Warrior Series 2 (HD) (Sports)
10.00 ONE Championship 2018/19: Kings Of Courage (Jakarta) (PG13) (Sports)
AM
1.15 ONE Championship Weekly (HD) (PG13) (Sports)
1.45 Close

SURIA

PM
4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)
5.00 Kultus (CC) (D)
6.00 Kem Tahan (IE)
6.30 Taste Selebriti (CC) (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (News)
8.30 Mamaku Sayang (CC) (PG) (S)
9.00 Generasi Merdeka: Tangan Yang Membentuk Negara (IE)
9.30 Tiket Cinta (PG) (CC) (Telemovie)
11.30 Berita (News)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singteltv.com.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
10.25 History Drama: Knightfall
11.20 The Warfighters
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 4
1.10 Swamp People 8
2.05 History Drama: Knightfall
3.00 Storage Wars 10
3.30 The Warfighters
4.25 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
5.20 Forged In Fire 5
6.15 Swamp People 8
7.10 Pawn Stars 19
8.05 Storage Wars: Texas 5
8.30 Storage Wars 10
9.00 Mountain Men 7
9.55 Alone 4
10.50 Swamp Mysteries With Troy Landry
11.45 The Curse Of Oak Island 4

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
10.00 Growing Up Supermodel
11.00 Atlanta Plastic
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 7
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 Gone/**3.35** Born This Way 2
4.30 Little Women LA: Terra's Little Family
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
7.00 Making A Model With Yolanda Hadid
8.00 The Rap Game 3
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 The Lost Wife Of Robert Durst
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
10.10 The House (NC16)
11.35 Cowboys & Aliens (NC16)
PM
1.30 American Assassin (NC16)
3.20 Crashing 3 (NC16)
3.50 Alvin And The Chipmunks: Chipwrecked/**5.15** Valentine's Day
7.20 Race To Witch Mountain
9.00 Captain America: Civil War
11.25 Dunkirk

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
9.25 Dead Mine (NC16)
10.45 Batman: Gotham By Gaslight (NC16)
PM
12.00 Red (PG)/**1.50** Carlito's Way: Rise To Power/**3.15** The Disappearance (NC16)
4.00 Spy Kids 2: Island Of Lost Dreams
5.40 Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope
7.45 Hulk
10.00 Looking Glass (NC16)
11.45 The Core

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
9.15 Dowry (HD)/**10.15** Hot Door Night Chinese New Year Special (Part 2) (HD)
PM
12.15 Still Loving You (HD)
1.30 Signal (HD)
2.45 Sound Of My Dream 2 (HD)
4.45 Still Loving You (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
8.00 Mr Player 7 (HD)
10.00 Singer 2019 (Live) (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
9.30 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships 2019: Opening Ceremony And Men's Short Programme
PM
3.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Billabong Pipe Masters Highlights
4.00 Multi Sport: Fise World Series 2018 Highlights: Jeddah
5.00 Tennis: Deuce 2019/**5.30** Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
6.00 Motorsports: FIA World RallyCross Championship 2018 Round 8 France Highlights
7.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
8.00 Snooker: 2018 English Open Finals Highlights
11.30 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
9.30 National Basketball League Round 17 New Zealand Breakers Vs Adelaide 36ers
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
PM
12.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton: Match 41 13th Place
12.30 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton: Match 42 Challenge Trophy
1.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton: Match 43 5th Place
1.30 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton: Match 44 Bronze Medal Finals
2.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton: Match 45 Cup Finals
3.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)
4.30 National Basketball League Round 17 Sydney Kings Vs Melbourne United (Live)
6.30 Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2018
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 National Basketball League 2018/19 – NBL Slam
8.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Hong Kong Eastern Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas (Live)
10.30 Wrestling: WWE Bottomline (PG)
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
AM
12.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)
1.30 Fiba World Basketball 2019
2.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
2.30 Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2018
3.30 Fiba World Basketball 2019
3.40 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 31 Aston Villa Vs Sheffield United (Live)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Running Man Animation
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernoobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 Craig Of The Creek
3.00 Rat-A-Tat
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Craig Of The Creek
6.00 Apple & Onion
6.30 Unikitty
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings
7.55 The Heroic Quest Of The Valiant Prince Ivandoe
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 Transformers: Cyberverse
9.30 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 MacGyver 2
6.50 Seal Team
7.40 Team Ninja Warrior
9.25 MacGyver 2
10.20 Seal Team
11.15 The Amazing Race Asia 5
PM
1.00 Quantico 3
1.55 Team Ninja Warrior
2.50 MacGyver 2
3.45 Seal Team
4.40 The Amazing Race Asia 5
6.25 MacGyver 3
7.15 Instinct
8.10 Hawaii Five-0 9
9.05 Seal Team 2
10.00 Charlie's Angels
11.50 Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 The Carbonaro Effect 2
6.50 Major Crimes 5
7.40 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow
8.25 Person Of Interest 4
9.15 The Flash 4
10.05 The Carbonaro Effect 2
10.55 Almost Genius
11.45 Crazy, Stupid, Love
PM
1.55 The Big Bang Theory 9
2.20 Friends 9
2.45 The Carbonaro Effect 2
3.10 Almost Genius
4.00 The Flash 4
4.50 Person Of Interest 4
5.40 Major Crimes 5
6.30 The Flash 4
7.20 The Big Bang Theory 9
7.45 Friends 9
8.10 The Big Bang Theory 12
8.35 Young Sheldon 2
9.00 Gotham 5
9.50 Lights Out
11.20 The Big Bang Theory 12
11.45 Young Sheldon 2

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.55 Just For Laughs Gags 14
7.20 Mr Bean
7.50 Most Ridiculous
8.15 Amazingness
8.40 Mr Bean
9.10 Caraoke Showdown
9.35 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.00 Hot In Cleveland
10.50 Mr Bean
11.20 Saturday Night Live 43
PM
12.10 The Daily Show 24
12.35 The Goldbergs 5
1.25 Hot In Cleveland 6
2.15 Saturday Night Live 43
3.05 The Burn With Jeff Ross 2
3.30 Jeff Ross Presents Roast Battle II: War Of The Words
4.15 The Goldbergs 5
5.05 Hot In Cleveland 6
5.55 The Daily Show 24
6.45 Above Average Presents
6.50 Your Face Or Mine 4
7.15 Amazingness
7.40 Billy On The Street 3
8.00 Most Ridiculous
8.25 Above Average Presents
8.30 Most Ridiculous
8.55 The Goldbergs 5
9.45 Hot In Cleveland 6
10.30 Inside Amy Schumer 2
10.50 Above Average Presents
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 Above Average Presents
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Taste Of Love
7.00 First Love
8.00 Entrepreneurial Age
9.00 Eagle And Youngster
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.00 Entrepreneurial Age
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.10 First Love
10.00 Entrepreneurial Age
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
Something new takes over your mental space. You feel up to any new challenge, so embrace the novelty.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
Avoid snap decisions. In fact, avoid making decisions because you will not get the information you need.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
Listen when people start telling you what is what – they know things you could not yet have learnt.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)
You are in a big hurry, but try to do things right. If you move too quickly, you are sure to mess up.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)
If you can slack off at work, so much the better. Your people are sure to find your energy exhilarating.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
Colleagues are getting on your nerves. It is time for you to make sure they are at least listening to you.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)
Business matters are much easier to attend to now, as long as you are focusing on the right people.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
A simple disagreement can get ugly, so recognise it while it is happening and pull back quickly.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
You are playing games, but you are not trying to play anyone. You are having fun and getting things done.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
Take responsibility for whatever went down recently. People will be impressed by your stance.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
You see patterns where others see random noise. Take the chance to fill in the gaps.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)
Things are getting weird for your people, so make the effort to assure them.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Charmaine Yee
4.00 Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman
10.00 Cheryl Miles
PM
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kemin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.17am/7.21pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 9.38am/9.57pm

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 1.33am (2.8m), 7.07am (1.3m), 12.56pm (3.1m), 7.37pm (0.6m). Desaru: 1.16am (2.7m), 6.52am (1.6m), 12.30pm (2.6m), 6.52pm (0.9m). Port Dickson: 3.05am (0.3m), 8.38am (2.5m), 3.20pm (0.3m), 9.02pm (2.5m). Mersing: 12.49am (3.1m), 6.53am (1.7m), 12.08pm (2.5m), 6.17pm (1.1m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 1.56am (2.8m), 7.37am (1.2m), 1.30pm (3m), 8.03pm (0.7m). Desaru: 1.43am (2.7m), 7.22am (1.5m), 1.07pm (2.6m), 7.26pm (1m). Port Dickson: 3.34am (0.3m), 9.06am (2.4m), 3.38pm (0.3m), 9.25pm (2.5m). Mersing: 1.15am (3m), 7.16am (1.6m), 12.46pm (2.5m), 6.45pm (1.2m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

HBO also just released 14 new photos for the upcoming season, with one of them showing Kit Harington as Jon and Emilia Clarke as Daenerys Targaryen in the same image (left). PHOTO: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

Game Of Thrones finale teaser reveals important scenes

The upcoming season finale of Game Of Thrones, the Emmy-winning HBO Original series, will debut in Asia at the same time as the United States on April 15 at 9am on HBO GO and HBO.

The debut date was announced last month together with a new teaser, titled Crypts Of Winterfell, for the show's eighth and final season, which will last six episodes.

Unlike previous Season 8 teasers, the new teaser is not just a mash-up of previous episodes, as it contains some very useful reminders regarding lineage, The Washington Post reported.

The teaser features Jon Snow, Sansa Stark and Arya Stark touring the crypt under Winterfell, where statues of their ancestors and the recently fallen stand.

Voice-overs of now-dead Starks from previous seasons can be heard: Lyanna Stark saying, "You have to protect him"; Catelyn Stark saying, "All this horror that has come to my family, it's all because I couldn't love a motherless child"; and Ned Stark saying, "You are a Stark. You might not have my name, but you have my blood".

A feather falls to the ground.

Then the three living people come face-to-face with statues of themselves as they look now, which is generally freaky and also pretty scary given the implication, according to The Washington Post.

A gust of wind extinguishes their torches, the cold takes over and ice creeps towards them, freezing everything in its path, including the feather.

Arya and Jon draw their swords as they confront whatever kind of undead situation is before them, The Washington Post reported.

HBO has also just released 14 new photos for the upcoming season, with one of them showing Kit Harington as Jon and Emilia Clarke as Daenerys Targaryen in the same image.

There are also other photos featuring Sophie Turner as Sansa, Maisie Williams as Arya and Emmy- and Golden Globe-winner Peter Dinklage as Tyrion Lannister.

Based on the popular book series, A Song Of Ice And Fire, by George R.R. Martin, the hit fantasy series chronicles an epic struggle for power in a vast and violent kingdom.

Members of the ensemble cast for the seventh season included Dinklage, Clarke, Harington, Turner, Williams and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau.

Cardi B gets set to storm the Grammys with a live performance and five Grammy nominations. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Cardi B to lead girl power charge at Grammy Awards

LOS ANGELES • Rappers Kendrick Lamar and Drake may lead the nominations, but Sunday's Grammy Awards looks set to be a showcase for girl power.

Outspoken rapper Cardi B, whose music and personal life has dominated pop culture for the past two years, leads the charge on music's biggest night with a live performance and five Grammy nominations, including for album and record of the year.

R&B singer Alicia Keys will host the Grammys for the first time, while Miley Cyrus, Janelle Monae, Camila Cabello and Kacey Musgraves are also among the performers at the Los Angeles ceremony.

Adding to the star power, Motown legend Diana Ross will take the stage to mark her 75th birthday next month, and hopes are high that Lady Gaga will perform her Grammy- and Oscar-nominated song Shallow from the movie A Star Is Born.

Yet Cardi B is likely to grab most of the attention. The 26-year-old New York artist is one of only a handful of female rappers and has captured attention with her message of female empowerment, on and off marriage to rapper Offset, and a string of hit records and collaborations, including I Like It, Girls Like You and Taki Taki.

"Cardi B is a very strong woman who is in control of her career. She is really talented and has something to say and she is just fun. She is like a breath of fresh air," said Melinda Newman, West Coast editor for Billboard magazine.

"Between Alicia Keys and all the female nominees, I think we will have a very female-leading show. That's not necessarily by design, that's just how it's shaking out this year," Newman added.

This year, five of the eight nominees for the coveted album of the year award are women, including Cardi B's Invasion Of Privacy and Monae's Dirty Computer.

Six of the eight musicians competing for best new artist are also women, including Dua Lipa, Chloe x Halle, Bebe Rexha and H.E.R.

REUTERS

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Submit yours soon as entries close on 19 February 2019, midnight.

*Tickets and passes only admit entry on 14 March 2019, 7.30PM. Participation is subjected to Terms and Conditions available on the contest page.

Organiser: life Partner: BASE ENTERTAINMENT ASIA

On social media

STAR-STUDDED NEW YEAR: In a rare photo of Hong Kong actor-director Nick Cheung and his family, he is seen with (from left) his wife, actress Esther Kwan, their daughter Brittany, Cantonese opera actress Bak Sheut Sin and veteran actress Connie Chan. Cheung and his family were paying a visit to Bak's house on Tuesday, the first day of Chinese New Year. Other celebrities visiting Bak included director Stanley Kwan and veteran journalist Wong Man Ling. Cheung is best known for his roles in the movies The Beast Stalker (2008) and Unbeatable (2013), with both roles winning him the Hong Kong Film Award for Best Actor. He also won the Golden Horse Film Award for Best Actor for his role in The Beast Stalker.He has also directed and acted in the movies Hungry Ghost Ritual (2014), Keeper Of Darkness (2015) and The Trough (2018). PHOTO: FACEBOOK/WONG MAN LING

China screens its own sci-fi blockbuster

BEIJING • A Chinese sci-fi movie featuring Shanghai landmarks collapsing in earthquakes and the Earth about to collide with Jupiter hit China's cinema screens on Tuesday.

The Wandering Earth is China's first big-budget sci-fi film and it has created high expectations for Chinese movie fans who hope it will usher in a new era for Chinese sci-fi. It is adapted from a short story by Hugo Award winner Liu Cixin.

In the film, mankind is threatened by a dying and swelling sun, and giant thrusters propel the planet out of the solar system on a 2,500-year journey in search of a new sun.

It focuses on a Chinese astronaut and his emotionally estranged son, as they join a global mission to prevent Earth from crashing into Jupiter.

Director Guo Fan told Xinhua that the movie was not a "hero movie" but about humanity fighting a crisis "as one community".

"It has little to do with nations, races or languages – at that time (of global calamities) everyone makes the same choice. In our story, there is no superhero who saves the world, but ordinary people united as one to embark on the wandering journey with Earth," he said.

Apart from Hollywood-style visuals, the movie is trying to woo moviegoers with its many Chinese elements, from Chinese New Year (CNY) celebrations in Beijing's underground city and Shanghai in a doomsday scenario to typical Chinese parenting.

As a high-grossing film genre, sci-fi movies in China are mostly Hollywood imports.

The Wandering Earth has received good reviews in previews, including from Liu, who hailed the movie as "good beyond expectation".

"It's hard to believe that this is the first big-budget sci-fi blockbuster done by China," said the author of the award-winning The Three-Body Problem. "If it fares well in the box office, it will set a good start for China's future sci-fi movies."

The film took four years to complete, and Guo, whose previous works include a teen film and a fantasy romance film, said the hardest part was overcoming ubiquitous disbelief that his team could produce a high-quality sci-fi movie.

The film will run into an intensely competitive CNY holiday, a peak movie-going period in China, facing rivals including Stephen Chow's The New King Of Comedy, Jackie Chan's The Knight Of Shadows: Between Yin And Yang and Hong Kong crime film Integrity.

XINHUA

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